

THE STARLESS NIGHT

Although completely independent as a novel, *The Starless Night* continues the story of Thornton, who was the central character of *Somewhere a Voice is Calling*. Thornton has come into some money and now lives in Spain with Dominique, his second wife, and his two small daughters. Dominique's determination to lead an independent life makes her leave him to work as a mail-nequin, while his craving for excitement involves him in adventures that can only end disastrously with the police on his trail. His daughter Barbara and his mistress Nuria accompany him on some of these escapades, with terrible consequences, and the girl Maruja, who loves him, is powerless to save him. Few of his friends remain faithful to him by the end of the book, but Barry Keating, most charming and lawless of them all, deals with Dominique after his fashion, crosses swords with Aranjuez, a frightening Spanish Security Chief, and finally speaks Thornton's epilogue. His end is characteristically both grotesque and deeply moving.)

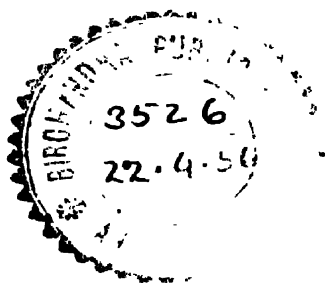
Books by John Lodwick

RUNNING TO PARADISE
PEAL OF ORDNANCE
THE FILIBUSTERS
MYRMYDA
THE CRADLE OF NEPTUNE
BROTHER DFATH
TWENTY EAST OF GREENWICH
STAMP ME MORTAL
SOMETHING IN THE HEART
JUST A SONG AT TWILIGHT
FIRST STEPS INSIDE THE ZOO
LOVE BADE ME WELCOME
SOMEWHERE A VOICE IS CALLING
THE BUTTERFLY NET
THE STARLESS NIGHT

THE STARLESS NIGHT

by

JOHN LODWICK



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One

THIS IS 1952 . . . remember that year? But don't remember it unless it makes one of those dull, dull, dingy sounds inside your own heart. I come unnamed. Not many people do not these days.

"But, my dear madam, I assure you!" said Thornton, "the well dressed maid is wearing blue this year."

The woman looked at Thornton doubtfully. In the background Maruja hovered: she did not like him to serve the customers personally: "It is beneath your dignity," she often said.

"Let's put it this way," continued Thornton. "Here I am, a business man: now would I get in something like fifty thousand pesetas worth of blue uniforms, not to mention all those chauffeur's caps you see, unless I had definite advance information of the fashion trends for domestic servants?"

Suddenly, he became tired of it all, and called to Maruja. "What's the time?" he said.

"One o'clock."

"Well, take her over, then. I'm going down to the airport." He made his way along the narrow aisle behind the counter, and past the green baize door into the office. In a corner, Luis was typing letters on an ancient Underwood.

"There's a woman here," he said, "who wants to know whether we can arrange to have her name in block letters on the backs of her gardeners' overalls. I suppose she got the idea from those hotel towels. . . . *'Don't steal my handyman.'*"

"If she'd let me write it lower down, I'd do the job for nothing," said Thornton. He took some money out of his desk. "Well, I'm off now," he said. "I'll bring the child in when she arrives."

"I'm looking forward to seeing her," said Luis.

On his way through the shop, Thornton winked at Maruja. "Don't forget," he said to the customer, who was fingering a gingham overall. "Blue . . . blue's the thing."

"Who is that man?" said the woman to Maruja, in Catalan, as soon as he had gone.

"That's the owner of the shop."

"But he's not Spanish."

"Well," said Maruja, "some foreigners are human beings, too, you know."

In the street, Thornton secured a taxi. "Take me to the British Airways office, please," he said, and dabbed at his face with a folded handkerchief, for although this was the last week of September, the sun was still very hot. At a traffic stop in the Rambla Catalunya he watched a bootblack who had captured a tourist in suede shoes, and who was no doubt explaining that these, too, could be brushed and made like new. "Barcelona, you secret, gilded, five-faced whore, I love you," said Thornton, and the taxi-driver looked back through the plate glass in surprise at him.

Outside the airways office men were loading luggage with bright, bright labels on to the roof of a bus. In the waiting-room sat the anxious, outbound passengers; the women clutching their handbags, the men sucking at pipes or fingering the severed stubs of travellers' cheques. Thornton did not pause here, but entered the inner *despacho* of the manager, Tyson.

"Listen," he said. "Can I go down with your brood in that bus?"

"You can come down with me in the car," said Tyson.

"You're a nice man, Tyson. You say just what one hopes you will. Tell me, do you take these air-sickness tablets, too?"

"It's aspirin I need at the end of the season," said Tyson. "I'm taking my own holiday next week, and I'm going by train. Where have you been all the summer, Thornton? I haven't seen you for months."

"Well, I was in a fisherman's cabin down at Calafell. At least my wife was: we rented it. Personally, I had to spend most of the time in the shop."

"Ah yes; that shop! I must come in and look at you sometime."

"You might do worse. I could sell you a peaked cap that would look a bit better than that shoddy thing you've got hanging on the peg over there. What is it . . . a Glengarry?"

"Don't be rude, Thornton . . . and stop playing with my coloured pencils. I never knew a man who could put me in a bad temper so quickly. Well . . . I've got things to do . . . be back in a moment."

Tyson went out. Left alone, Thornton examined the great coloured wall map, with the Pyrénées and Massif Central in relief. Upon this map white tapes led from London to many—oh so many—parts of Europe. Along the route indicated by one such tape his daughter, Barbara, was flying at the present moment. Barbara was probably nine thousand feet up and looking down on Toulouse, the city of violets. In the next seat an old man from Manchester, who had already twice bought her sweets from the air hostess, would be dozing, his knees trembling slightly; and this tremor, private and internal, not caused by the thrum of the winged vehicle in which he rode towards his natural destiny—two hours of talk concerning shirts.

Tyson returned, and said that he was ready. They passed through the waiting-room. Several of the hitherto recumbent Britons now arose. One of these, florid from a too hasty luncheon, intercepted Tyson with bitter complaints that he was being overcharged for excess baggage.

“Let me see the scales,” said Tyson, who, amid a daily dozen difficulties, invariably contrived to be pleasant.

“No, no,” interrupted Thornton, “none of that nonsense.” He turned to the angry passenger, and seized him by the lapel of his coat. “Where are those Boy Scouts?” he said.

“Eh? Who are you? What the devil do you mean, sir?”

“Now don’t you give me any of that Hampstead double talk,” said Thornton. “Where are those unfortunate little boys? There is clear proof that you arrived in this country with ten Scouts: where are they now?”

“I shall complain to the company about this, sir,” said the passenger to Tyson.

“I don’t think you’ll have time,” said Thornton. “Scotland Yard will be there when you touch down at Northolt.” He turned to the assembled company. “I ask you not to speak to this gentleman during your trip,” he said. “I am sure that nobody here present wishes to be called as a witness,” and, taking Tyson by the arm, he pulled him through the door towards the waiting car.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” said Tyson, as they drove away, past the bull-ring and the barracks, towards the River Llobregat.

“I know I shouldn’t have,” said Thornton.

“That man will be the Black Death on the plane all the way to

London. Turn me out one or two more scenes like that and I'll lose my job."

"Oh no, you won't. You have charm and patience, Tyson. You're wasted in that Ecuadorian uniform. You ought to be in the Consular Service. God knows they need a ray of sunshine there."

Tyson glanced curiously at Thornton. "Why *did* you leave the Service, Thornton?" he said.

"Came into some money, old man."

"I see." But Tyson didn't see. One inherited money: and very pleasant, no doubt, it was to do so, but unless the sum were considerable, as seemed unlikely in the present case, it was surely an insufficient excuse for the abandonment of congenial and pensionable employment. And yet . . . and yet there had been no hint of any scandal: of that he was quite certain.

"Want to know how, and how much?" said Thornton.

"I don't mind," said Tyson. Not for the first time he wondered why Thornton always told everybody everything.

"Fourteen thousand," said Thornton. "The whole thing was distinctly odd . . . even involving one of those curious newspaper advertisements which begin: '*Any person knowing the whereabouts of . . .*'"

"A distant relative?" said Tyson.

"Not at all. My mother and father. They were killed in an air-raid on Taunton in 1942. Presumably, a will disappeared in the house at the same time. So did their bank down the street, together with its archives. I had no idea they had that amount of money, and so, consequently, I pursued the matter with my usual detachment. In fact I hadn't even written to Lloyds for over six years, so that they can hardly be blamed for sitting put and awaiting my claim."

"Just one little point at this stage," said Tyson. "Would you mind telling me how you managed to get the money out here, in spite of the currency restrictions?"

"Well . . . I do hate banks and the Exchange Control, don't you agree? I don't mind admitting now that it all came out round the waist of a very nice man travelling in one of your planes."

A lorry was coming: down the straight black road upon the surface of which the tarmac was melting in the afternoon heat, a lorry was coming; laden, no doubt, with melons from Valencia.

"*Chic-a-chic-chic.*" The lorry driver had pressed a button. In Spain, commercial vehicles are seldom equipped with the conventional motor horn. They possess, in its place, an auditory device which imitates the sound of a thousand agonised crickets.

"I'm damned if I'll let him have the right of way. He's holding the whole road," said Tyson.

But, at the last moment, he swerved. The two vehicles crossed: for one second—one—the eyes of the two drivers met, in hatred: a pinprick on the time-sheet of their destinies.

"You see," said Thornton. "You see . . ."

"It seems scarcely the moment for the police to find you in some twisted wreckage," observed Tyson.

"It would be one way we could have gone to Heaven together . . . 'My friend had wings in his terrestrial life' . . . that's what I'd have said when they began to take the details down."

"Thornton . . . if you had all that money, why did you stay here?"

"Wife and many children."

"Nonsense."

"Tyson, did you ever consider the question that most men's troubles arise from their inability to remain indefinitely chaste?"

"All right . . . let's say it isn't nonsense," said Tyson briskly. "But Barcelona . . . Barcelona, that I cannot simply understand. This shop is no place for you. Why don't you try one of the Crown Colonies?"

"I seem to remember a soldier's rhyme about that," said Thornton. "I did think for a moment," he added, "of going to Mauritius, but then I discovered that the place is full of Hindus."

"Well, don't let's cry about it," said Tyson. "I understand you have your compensations for a sedentary life—quite lucrative ones, too, I've been told."

"That's right."

"How's your wife, Thornton?"

"My wife's still growing."

I saw her in the street the other day. She was looking very smart."

"My dear fellow, if you ask me politely I'll invite you to dinner one night, and then you can see her at close quarters . . . if she happens to be in."

Tyson lifted his foot from the accelerator. The car slowed.

then turned down the narrow country road which led towards the airport.

"Is your daughter coming out for long?" he said.

"She's coming out for good, I hope."

"Oh—why?"

"She was with an aunt of mine in Bath. Now the poor woman is ill and, judging by the roundabout way in which her husband writes about it, the thing is evidently cancer. I can't leave the child on their hands in those circumstances."

"Will you send her to school here?"

"I suppose so."

"You could do worse than the French *lycée*," said Tyson. "I've got my two brats there. They don't seem to have heard of Racine yet, but their Catalan is much improved. Well, here we are." He brought the car to a stop behind a bunch of Packards with Madrid and diplomatic number-plates. "Can you look after yourself?" he said.

"Oh yes," said Thornton. He walked through the entrance hall with its newspaper stand, its booths displaying dolls in Andalusian costume and bright Toledo daggers. He entered the bar, ordered a bottle of mineral water, and, swinging his stool round, surveyed the outbound scene. Presently the English party who had travelled down by bus arrived, apprehensive, eager for the saving cup of coffee. The man whom Thornton had accused of the assassination of Boy Scouts moved instinctively towards his natural habitat, the bar, but, observing that the position was already occupied by the enemy, halted, then turned away, disgruntled. Thornton smiled at him blandly. He left money on the counter, he advanced, and, as he passed the man, he whispered: "Not Scotland Yard. It isn't true. Nothing's true. Just wait and see. You'll find that out."

Beyond the lounge, beyond the line of windows lay the terrace. Many people—even from Barcelona itself—came to sit on this terrace, and to watch the come and go of planes. Thornton had never been able to understand why they did this: in any of the larger cafés on the Ramblas one could equally well view the spectacle of people arriving from, or about to leave for, foreign parts; though there, it was true, without the added delight of petrol fumes, and the roar and throb of aeroplanes.

Thornton did not go to the terrace. Instead, he leant against the

barrier through which the outbound passengers were despatched. An old man in blue overalls, guardian of this gateway to another world, surveyed him with lethargic dislike.

"You can't go through there."

"I know that."

"Well, don't stand there: you're in the way."

"How about this?" said Thornton. He produced a five-*duro* note and tendered it. "Am I in the way now?" he said.

The old man looked at the note. He spat. "Put it back in your pocket," he said. "All right, you can stay. It's the gesture that counts."

"Thank you," said Thornton.

They were silent for some moments.

"Haven't you found in your own life that it's the gestures that count?" enquired the old man presently.

"Oh yes," said Thornton. "Oh yes, I have, indeed." He looked behind him. About twenty yards away he saw Tyson in animated conversation with two English ladies who appeared to have mislaid something; no doubt their baggage tickets. Many people were crossing the tarmac towards a waiting plane.

"Is that the Rome flight?" said Thornton.

"That's right. Got a coffin on board her, too."

"What's that you said?"

"Apostolic Nuncio. Died of heart failure in Madrid. Didn't you read about it? Embalmed him, I dare say."

"Do the passengers know?"

"Not on your life, they don't. He's with the luggage in the back. Can't say I'd like to travel with a dead man myself."

"I don't see that it makes much difference," said Thornton. He looked at the clock. "When's this damned London plane coming in, anyway?" he said.

"That's her over there in the sky, circling," said the old man. "She'll land as soon as this fellow takes off. If you're waiting for somebody you'd best go round to the Reception: you won't catch him here."

"All right," said Thornton. For the second time he tendered the five-*duro* note.

"Sure you don't want it?"

"Don't be a fool, *hombre*," said the old man. "I wouldn't be working in a hole like this if there wasn't money in it, would I?"

Thornton approached Tyson, who, momentarily free of anguished travellers, had removed his peaked cap, and was wiping his brow daintily with a silk handkerchief:

"Do you mind if I go through into the Customs? It'll be easier to catch her there."

"Do anything you like, old man. All I ask is—don't steal a suitcase."

Except for the officials, who were laying out the many colours of chalk at their disposal, the Customs shed was deserted. Thornton examined the long counters with their raised, iron corrugations, each shiny from the slide and drag of thousands of valises. He could hear the plane taxi-ing in now, and his heart began to thump almost painfully. The man in front of him, after some hesitation, had selected a mauve chalk.

"You like mauve, do you?" said Thornton.

"It makes a change," said the man.

"Tell me—what *is* that squiggle you write on the luggage?"

"I generally draw a face myself," said the Customs man.

"Look!" He drew a face for Thornton on the counter.

The passengers were crossing the tarmac now. Presently, the first among them began to enter the Customs shed. Thornton peered anxiously, but as more and more people arrived, he could still see no sign of his daughter. At length, unable to bear the suspense any longer he approached a group of passengers. "Excuse me, there was a little girl on the plane with you, but I can't see her anywhere."

The passengers looked at him curiously: "There *was* a little girl," said one of them, "but at the last moment they wouldn't let her travel. If you're the father, I think you'll find the air hostess has a letter for you."

Thornton ran through the Customs shed and into the main hall towards the office of the British company. He discovered the pilot and the air hostess in conversation with Tyson.

"They must all be a bit odd in your family," said Tyson, "Somebody tried to put your daughter on the plane without a visa."

"Oh, my God!" said Thornton. He opened the letter. It was from Harold Morshead, the husband of his aunt. Visas being unnecessary for France, it had not occurred to him that they might be required for travel to Spain. He deeply regretted any inconvenience caused, would obtain the visa immediately, and

put the child on the first available plane. "I must telephone," said Thornton. He knew where they would be staying. They would be at the Langham.

"I don't want to be nasty, old man," said Tyson. "But if it's London you're calling you'll have to pay cash."

Thornton took some notes out of his pocket, and laid them on the desk. He picked up the telephone.

"I'd just got her into her seat when the police came on board," said the air hostess. "She cried and cried, poor little thing. It was quite pathetic."

"Do shut up," said Thornton. "I want so much to smack somebody's face in and I should hate it to be yours."

When the operator came on the line, he asked for international traffic.

Two

BY A QUARTER TO FIVE he was back in Barcelona. The telephone call to London had cost him more than four pounds. Thornton decided that, before doing anything else, he would win this money back. Accordingly he had himself driven to the Novedades Fronton, where he knew he would find a *pelota* match in progress. This game, which is played almost exclusively by Basques, presents many similarities to that of racquets, though here the ball travels even faster, the court is longer, and lateral use can be made of only one wall. The spectators sit in tiered rows behind wire netting. Through the mesh they see the green and floodlit court, the white and darting figures of the players. The din is constant, because against the netting lean the bookmakers, shouting their odds anew at each point marked in the game. The face of the bookmaker is international: the eyes are small, the double cheeks beneath are rose; the paunch, further down, progressive. The occupational ailment is rheumatic or varicose. The voice is hoarse, the manner domineering, the gestures delightful in their constant variety of upthrust thumb and outspread palm. In Barcelona and Bilbao younger sons ruin themselves and seriously hamper the financial operations of their

fathers by their injudicious betting upon this game, and, indeed, in the great commercial communities of these two cities such a destiny is considered, although regrettable, not devoid of honour: much as persons belonging to a numerous family will admit, in private thought, since statistics prove it, that one among their number must perish by some form of heart disease.

Behind the tiers of seats, in the many bars and corridors, the tarts linger, lifting flies with spoons from frigid coffee. It is warm here, in winter: much better than the hostile pavement or a house; and, furthermore, a man gripped by one mania may, should fortune give him her false and twisted grin, embark upon another, and accost them.

But in the afternoons few, except professional punters, are present. The atmosphere is more professional, almost like that of a Turkish bath. Man is alone, his eternal problem doused, quiescent; while his women sleep, or set a taxi course towards their evening search for fripperies.

Berriz was playing Olaeta when Thornton entered. They were playing 40-up, and Berriz was leading 34 to 28. Both of these men were very considerable artists, and had probably played each other more times than professional tennis players; yet the issue between them was invariably uncertain because both were temperamental, becoming easily despondent or choleric, and Berriz had even been known to climb up the wire netting, and, with his red sash dangling down between his legs, to shout at a spectator who had insulted him:

"You call me a *burro*? I call you a Child of Mary, and what is more, a virgin. If you are so clever, come out here and play with me. Some people play . . . and others watch."

Thornton, after ordering coffee and observing the players carefully, decided, although the score had now moved to 36-30, to bet upon Olaeta, against whom the bookmakers were offering odds which were the equivalent of 4-1. He placed his bet of two hundred *pesetas* with a bookmaker to whom his wife, Dominique, had first drawn his attention, and whom she called the '*Lascivious Toad*' because of his propensity for placing himself in positions from which he was able to observe the upper and more interesting portions of the legs of ladies seated above him . . . and, indeed, he frequently neglected his professional duties in order to obtain the intellectual stimulation which this sight afforded him.

Thornton bet upon Olaeta because he considered it perfectly apparent that Berriz had eaten too much at midday and was now slowing down. He was right. The match went to 38 all and then Olaeta won it with a beautiful drop shot, and an angled strike off the back of the court which left his opponent fumbling into movement, yards away.

Thornton took his winnings, and a brandy, and walked to the shop. The time was half-past five.

"Well, where is she?" said Maruja.

"She didn't come." He explained what had happened.

"Why are you taking money out of the till like that? Where are you going? You know Luis can never get the books straight when you keep taking money," she said.

"Are you going to start now, too?" said Thornton. "The main reason I opened this shop was to prevent people asking me where I was going. I have quite enough of that at home."

"Yes, and home is where you'd better go now," said Maruja. "Otherwise we shall have you in here to-morrow, slumped in a chair, and reading the newspapers. I know what those days are like when you read the newspapers, and go out, and come back with cognac *corriente* in your hip pocket. I've seen it. I've seen the bulge. You can't fool me with the lavatory."

"Luis!" said Thornton.

Luis came in. He was wearing a green eyeshade, set slightly askew. He had lately seen several American films, and had been deceived by these concerning those small exterior manifestations of manliness to such an extent that he now chewed bubble gum and drank only Coca-Cola.

"Luis," said Thornton. "You have a pack of cards, I believe? Take this woman inside and tell her that unless she changes—and this immediately—her way of life, a blond man with hair in his nostrils will strangle her."

And he stared at Maruja, and she stared at him, and he was thinking: "Oh yes, darling . . . yes . . . but what's the use of except a horrid end again?" and she was thinking: "Why must we do these things . . . why *must* he? . . . he started in the airport bar . . . and he's kept it up the whole way back, stopping the taxi every time he saw a barrel set outside a door."

"You can close the shop if you like," he said. "I won't be back to-night."

"This shop closes at eight and not before," said Maruja.

"As you wish." He opened a brown-paper package which he had been carrying tucked under his arm. "I brought you this," he said, and to Maruja he gave a copy of the French edition of *Vogue*, and to Luis a monkey which climbed up and down a strip of trellis work; a performance which might conceivably interest the two youngest of his five children.

"You must have spent a hundred *pesetas* on all that," said Maruja.

"A hundred and thirty-five, dear, if you must know."

"Never mind, it's a small price for the purchase of our silence, isn't it? Couldn't you take drugs or something and finish yourself off properly?"

"I have a friend who sells cocaine to some of your more indolent compatriots," said Thornton, "but somehow that never interested me."

"That doesn't surprise me," said Maruja. "No doubt it takes you away into another world before you can make enough nuisance of yourself in this one."

When he had gone, she opened the *Vogue*, and stared at a photograph of the mannequin in a Persian lamb coat, with the misty snout of the Place Vendôme pillar seen in the background.

"You ought to get yourself a coat like that," said Luis. He was playing with his monkey. Very likely his children would never see the toy at all. He would keep it in a drawer.

"I don't like the things you have to do to get such a coat," said Maruja. She closed the magazine. "What will happen to him?" she said.

"Nothing," said Luis. "He'll make one of his trips to the frontier. That's what he usually does when he's like this, isn't it? Of course, you can never tell." He blinked at her. "He might notice you one day. Then he could give you one of his wife's fur coats."

Thornton was walking down the street, looking for a taxi. Presently, he saw and hailed one. When the question of traffic lights was taken into consideration he would probably have arrived at his destination, the British Consulate, more rapidly if he had taken the Métro; but in this state he invariably travelled by taxi. He had once, after a series of rough calculations, worked out that if all the money which he had spent in his life upon taxis

were lodged in a bank he would have been able to purchase and run a Rolls-Royce motor-car.

The huge flag hung limp. There had been some discussion concerning this flag a few months previously when the Americans had moved into the floor immediately above their British allies. The Americans, too, had wished to hang out their flag, but the only suitable position for a national emblem was at the corner of the building, and from this advantageous situation the folds of the Stars and Stripes would have appeared to dominate those, not less garish, of the Union Jack. The British Consul had adopted a strong, indeed morally unassailable, position in this dispute, based on the seniority of his tenancy. However, an agreement had been reached, finally, whereby he would withdraw, allowing precedence to his neighbour, upon such solemn transpontine feasts as Independence, Labour and Thanksgiving Days.

Although Thornton had been inside these premises many times he had never worked here, having been stationed in Valencia until his resignation from the Service nine months previously. Entering now, and ignoring the Spanish receptionist, he walked down the long corridor towards Fife's office. On his way he passed another door, behind which, fifteen months ago he had met for the first time a man whom he was destined, subsequently, to kill. He did not look at this door, nor did he think about it. Sometimes, in dreams, he saw the body lying on the rocks. Then he would shout or mutter and Dominique would pinch or punch him, for she knew what caused these sounds, and they were unbearable to her.

"Ha!" said Fife. He looked intently at Thornton's eyes. This was the best way of knowing, in advance, how the interview was likely to proceed. He no longer liked Thornton, for many reasons, the most important of which was that he was in love with Thornton's wife.

"Should you really be reading in office hours?" said Thornton. He turned the book over: it was *Eugénie Grandet*. "You ought to come to work in a white dressing-gown," he said. "Then you'd be really like Balzac." Fife, as he well knew, was still attempting to write a novel.

"Is that all you want to see me about?" said Fife.

"No, I've come to talk about Barry Keating."

"It's not my fault if your smuggling friends get their boats impounded and themselves into gaol," said Fife. "What do you

• want me to do . . . send him some Turkish delight? From what I hear, I understand he's very comfortable, with a whole suite of cells to himself. In any case, Seville is not in our sector."

"I want you people to give me a letter. I may have to go and see him and a Consular letter would get me past the Governor."

"Why, what's wrong? Can't you manage your end of the business without the great man's advice?" Fife closed his book. He lit a cigarette but did not offer one to Thornton. "Desmond," he said. "You want to watch your step. We hear things. A lot of people seem very interested in your activities."

"Is that so? Then one of the things you may have heard is that those people don't think I ever left the Service at all? They think it was all a blind."

"Exactly . . . and that's the reason why you won't get that letter. Can't you go and do it all somewhere else, Desmond? You don't seem to realise what a handicap you are to us."

Thornton leant across the desk. He took one of Fife's cigarettes. "I hear you've taken up riding," he said. "Have you a good seat on a . . ." he lit the cigarette, "horse?" he said.

"I don't know," said Fife, "but when I do take a tumble I get up again. I don't just lie down in the mud."

"You must come to dinner with me one evening," said Thornton. "With all these lovely epigrams you're just the man I need to break the long moments of silence. D'you put them all in your books?"

"You leave my books alone," said Fife. "It may interest you to know that one of them has just been taken."

• Thornton was silent for a moment: then he said: "Well, I'm very glad to hear that, Ian. Really I am."

"It wasn't the last one," said Fife. "It was the one before; the one I read you bits of."

"I remember the bits," said Thornton. He was pleased that their interview would now close upon a cordial note. In point of fact, he now remembered less the reading of the excerpts themselves than his thoughts concerning those much larger sections of the book to which Fife had made no reference, so that the general theme of the novel had remained obscure, although there could be no doubt that it concerned Fife's relations with his mistress, Pilar Salas, with whom he was even now still living because he could not bring himself to break with her.

Dominique, curled up, her back and croup a white half-moon inside her housecoat, had listened to certain of these readings, sometimes knitting, her expression one of tolerant femininity: sometimes more attentive, her brows creased with thought, but always silent.

"It must be a terrible thing," Thornton had said to her once, when Fife had gone away, "a most offensive thing, for a man suddenly to realise that he's better than the woman whom he loves."

"Are you talking about yourself?" she had replied.

"No, darling. As you well know, the orthopaedic boot is on the other foot with me."

He said good-bye to Fife and left the building. There were two things which he could do now, and he intended to do them both, but one of them was more important. He took a taxi to his home, which was in a block of flats facing the Plaza Molina. As he was about to enter the lift, the *portero* came forward with a telegram. He opened this. The telegram was from Harold Morshead and announced that his daughter, Barbara, would arrive by the next day's Iberia flight.

Thornton had barely opened his own front door before his other daughter, whose name was Geneviève, and who would soon be two years old, ran forward and, clasping dumpy hands behind his knee-caps, pressed her marmaladen mouth against his trousers.

"D'you know," he said, as he carried her into her bedroom, where the nicer toys were strewn, "I believe you cost me more in benzine than you do in food." He put her on the rocking horse, and while he worked it slowly with his foot, shouted for the maid, Pepita, to bring him the stain remover.

"Where is the Señora?" he said, as he rubbed and rocked.

"She's out riding, señor. She left a note for you. Hasn't the little girl arrived?"

"No, she hasn't," and he explained why this was so.

"She must have been sad when they took her off the plane," observed Pepita.

She was in two minds about Barbara. With one of these minds she saw Barbara as a fabulous and dainty creature from far away who might prove abrupt and even rude with her, who could neither read nor write; with the other she envisaged the child as a companion whom she would teach to cook, to clean the bath, to water

plants, and wear ear-rings. Pepita was twenty-two years old. She came from the town of Jaen, in Andalusia, and she had been with the Thorntons almost all their time in Spain; ever since the first month in Valencia. "Papa," said Geneviève. "Pa—pa . . . pa . . . pa," but when he handed her the largest of her dolls, she threw it with surprising force into a corner. Geneviève preferred to be alone aboard her horse.

"Perhaps it's just as well that she didn't come to-day, with the Señora out," said Pepita, and she glanced at him obliquely as she picked up the doll, smoothed its rumpled skirt and straightened a fractured but still solid leg.

"Give me her note," said Thornton. Sometimes he would go into the kitchen and talk to Pepita about many things, but this was not one of those times.

He read the note. The first paragraph was devoted to the expected arrival of his daughter. Two shelves of a cupboard in the passage had been cleared and were available for such of Barbara's clothes as could not be hung. Pepita had received the most precise instructions, and everything would proceed smoothly if only he would make up his mind not to fuss. The second paragraph reminded him that, should he decide to go out, he must be back before nine o'clock, having himself invited a man called José Benran and an unknown woman to dinner.

"But I thought that was on Friday?" he said. "Are you sure she's right? She said nothing about it at lunch-time."

"You told me yourself yesterday morning to go out and buy a hare," said Pepita.

"Ah yes, so I did. I hope you bought something else as well? These are fried-potato people, I should say. Cream, too, very likely. You'd better get a tin of those filthy peaches, and pour the cream over them. Get some cheese for me: make a *cheese soufflé*: it sometimes tempts even people like that away from the sludge."

"The Señora said a fresh fruit salad," said Pepita.

"All right—and I say a fresh pink neck," said Thornton. "Two years old and never been bitten." He played leap-frog with his lips along his child's neck. Geneviève wriggled, then her hand came up and pulled at his nose. With the exception of her mother, whom she seldom saw except during the play-hour in the morning bed, he was the only person to whom she was prepared to

offer a permanent affection: and this because he would get down on his knees and play the floor games until the very end: until she herself grew tired of them, and felt at his pockets for sweets.

He went into the bedroom, and changed his suit. While he was buttoning his waistcoat he looked at the stiff spread counterpane upon that domestic conference nook: their bed. Pepita knocked on the door: "You promise to be back by nine," she said.

"Yes . . . yes . . . I promise. Hide Geneviève while I make my getaway." He could hear the child crying in the room along the passage. She had never become reconciled to these constant departures of her parents from the premises and sometimes would sob, inconsolable, for as long as half an hour.

She was still sobbing when, fifteen minutes later, Thornton rang the bell of a flat in the Calle Copérnico. "Is the Señora in?"

The maid nodded. He went into the sitting-room. Freddy Cherr was lying on a sofa. She was wearing slacks and bedroom slippers. She was reading. There was a glass of brandy on the carpet beside her. Beneath a writing desk in a corner of the room her son, Abel, aged about four, was engaged in breaking the delicate framework of a kite.

"Everybody I see to-day seems to be reading," said Thornton.

"You look as if you could do with a little quiet study yourself," said Freddy. "If you want a drink you'll find the cupboard open." She pointed.

Thornton helped himself to brandy. He sat down on a *pouf* beside her. "*English Romanticism*," he said, quoting the title of her book. "That's a good one. Does it say anything about me?"

"Yes," said Freddy. "There's a whole case history about a father who got drunk because his daughter didn't come on an aeroplane."

"How do you know about that?"

"Tyson's coming here to play bridge to-night. I had him on the telephone half an hour ago."

"It's delightful how quickly these things get about."

"My dear Desmond, the things you do become known almost as quickly as the news that icebergs are drifting south off the coast of Newfoundland. Big ships alter course. Little ones run for shelter."

"You're my port in the storm," he said.

"Yes, dear, exactly. The only time you ever come here is when the sea is rough, and what a nuisance you are then."

"Am I really a nuisance?" he asked humbly.

"No, you're not. Sit down. Stop pacing." He stopped pacing. Lifting herself slightly, Freddy threw her book at the crouching child: "Stop snuffling, Abel, or I'll have you put to bed." The child paid no attention. Having broken the various stays, he was now stabbing with a nail-file at the canvas fabric of the kite. He knew that if he could make but one small hole he could then insert first his finger, then his entire hand, and rip.

Alarmed, no doubt, by Freddy's cry, the maid entered the room hurriedly, gave her mistress a single reproachful look, then picked up the child and carried him away, out of sight, if not out of sound. Presently she returned and, with a second reproachful glance, took away the remnants of the kite.

"You see!" said Freddy. "You see what one is up against? The tyrannical, unfeeling mother. It's a role they're all as anxious for you to play as London theatre managers to get Olivier again in *Hamlet*. A mother never has a chance: a million milkless breasts are ranged against her."

"And fathers?" said Thornton.

"Oh, fathers have such fun: all that emotional self-torture as they pace up and down the weary Turkish carpet in the waiting-room, not to mention the day, four months before the birth, when she said suddenly: 'Look!' and showed the first white drop extracted by much pressure from the nipple . . . not to mention, too, the sublime enjoyment of the moment when he lays his healthy, unhurt ear against the swollen stomach and hears, for the first time, the monster not entirely couchant either in its lair." Freddy paused. She reached down, lifted her glass, and drank nearly all of its contents. "Oh, father has fun," she said. "Such fun father has, built up because it's mother who must scold, mother who must prick them with safety pin while pinning up the nappy. But father sits there, secure in his armchair, an offertory plate for the infant complex." Again she paused. There was not enough left in her glass. "Get up, and get me some more brandy," she said.

"Is that wise?" he said.

"Desmond, don't be stupid. When you talk like that you sound like a barker in a fairground saying 'Ladies and Gents, don't

come in here. There's a lady with two heads inside this tent. You'll be scared to death, Ladies and Gents . . . don't come in here . . . don't.' 'I often think you're a bigger bore than me,' she said.

"Go on about the father," said Thornton.

"I don't want any more fathers. I've lost the thread." He handed her the brandy. She sipped. "Father has five years. After that his time is over . . ." She stopped talking. He saw her lips move. There was obviously a first-class historical parallel blocked somewhere down the line. "You only like me, really," she said, "because I remind you of Gloria."

He wondered if this could be true. This Gloria had been his first wife, but she was dead now. Of course the resemblance was present; even a certain physical resemblance, though this less one of feature and colouring than of build and carriage: the same somewhat ineffectual penguin gestures of the open hand, the same toss of the head, as the hair, several inches too long for comfort—and always for fashion—tickled the cheeks. Gloria had been a big woman. Freddy, although still slim, long of leg, delicate of shoulder, was built massively; the worthy granddaughter of Australian pioneer who had gone out from tin shacks before dawn with a sieve, some dry bread and cheese, and canvas bag in which to place mud and gold dust.

Yes, the resemblance was there, but what went on inside the two skulls, behind the smooth cold-creamed mask, presented a difference of quality: in both thought and capacity for feeling. In literary terms it could be described as the difference between George Sand and Lady Blessington, in those of natural history as, that between the ant, crossing yards of ensnaring bracken with a crumb fallen from a tripper's sandwich between its choppers, and the destiny, not less controlled by instinct, of the lemming who must surely know, as he swims out to sea, that the end is death.

"Where is Peter?" he said, for Peter was her husband, and had paid for this drink.

"I've no doubt he's teaching," said Freddy. She got up, lurched once, steadied, took a red flower from a vase, began to tear the petals off it. Fifteen years. That is almost nothing in the lifetime of a man who holds adequate life insurance, and the prospect of a pension. Yet it is almost five thousand days. Ah, five thousand days, with their black nights just before the morning

starts to beam, and then those afternoons . . . those *afternoons*.

And from this she suffered . . . all the time, all the sober time. she suffered because her husband—she could only respect men who did in fact despise or who affected to despise her—because her husband had chosen to move his marriage bed, and had installed the first of a dozen dull mistresses within it, in another room. And she loved him, with the thin love of habit, and with the memories of other days.

"What time is it?" said Thornton.

Freddy told him. "In that case," he said, "I'd better go. We have a dinner party."

"Oh, Desmond, what a beast you are. We were just upon the brink of several stirring confidences."

"I must go or I'll catch hell."

"Surely not, Desmond. You look as if you'd caught that long ago."

There were two lifts in the building. On his way down in one of them he heard the other coming up, and from within it the sound of a familiar cough. The two lifts passed each other. Peering through the lateral grating of his cage Thornton saw the bent head of Peter Cherr. Peter was studying a clump of papers. Peter always hated to waste a single moment of his waking time.

On entering his own flat Thornton behaved with prudence. He closed the front door gently behind him, listened for a moment to the rumours of impending dinner coming from the kitchen, then made his way towards the bathroom. As he expected, Dominique, already dressed, stood before the mirror. She did not turn but, with lipstick poised, said

"So she didn't come?"

"Let's not talk about it. She'll be here to-morrow. Did you ride well?"

"Not very. They made me take my first jumps, and I fell."

"Ah? Was it muddy?"

"How could it be muddy? You know quite well that there's a roof overhead. Anyway, it wasn't serious. I got up again at once and by myself."

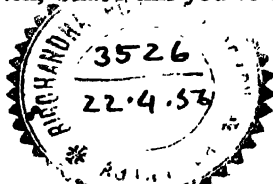
"Was Fife there?"

"No."

"Who was there?"

"Oh, various people. Listen, what's this you've been saying to

[20]



Pepita about a cheese *soufflé*? I wish you wouldn't always interfere."

"It was only a suggestion."

"Well, supposing you go into the sitting-room and get the drink out? That's rather more in your line."

"All right."

He was leaving when she called him back: "Aren't you even going to kiss me?" she said. He kissed her neck. "Do be good to-night," she said.

"Oh, I won't say a thing."

"That's sometimes even worse than when you do."

He arranged the cocktail tray carefully on a side-table. Presently, while he was reading the evening paper, Dominique came in. She took the paper away from him, and sat down on his knee. "Be nice to me, be nice to me," she said and, bending, tickled his chin with her eyelashes. Something must have happened, he thought.

"Who is this woman whom Beltran's bringing?" he asked.

"I don't know. He was very mysterious, but then he always is. I don't like Beltran. He's not clever, merely malicious."

"You don't like anyone who is ill," he said.

"I like you," she continued, with the little Cupid mouth

Their guests arrived ten minutes later and, while busy serving drinks and producing plates of potato crisps and stuffed olives, Thornton had an opportunity of observing them. The woman was called Nuria something-or-other: in the flurry of introductions Thornton seldom retained anybody's family name, and sometimes months would pass and other meetings occur before, by roundabout means, he discovered their full identity. Her name, then, was Nuria, and she was sitting up straight in a stiff-backed chair and employing conversational range-finding tactics with Dominique . . . had she seen this film . . . did she ride? Then she must have seen that polo match . . . perhaps she knew such and such a person? Lolling at ease on the sofa, Dominique replied briefly, contriving to make these exchanges appear less a conversation than an interview which she had been graciously pleased to accord.

The woman was clearly taken aback by the insolent placidity of Dominique's manner and, presently, sought to abandon the interrogatory for the critical role, but Dominique possessed considerable experience not only in placing but also in maintain-

ing women until the last good-byes in an awkward social posture and, having evidently disliked this one from the start, she refused to be drawn on the subject of books; her intention being no doubt, with a few well placed monosyllables, to expose an unwelcome and dangerously good-looking guest as a pretentious chatterbox. The woman, however, was not stupid. Perceiving her danger, she ceased talking, and stared, instead, at Thornton. Meanwhile José Beltran, to whom the mutual animosity of his friends was as necessary as the weekly injections of aureomycin which delayed the onward march of a fungoid disease in his bronchial tubes, watched the scene with sardonic amusement and, when asked by Thornton if he wished to use the bathroom before dinner, accepted with alacrity.

"Delightful, isn't she?" he said.

"Absolutely charming."

"My dear fellow, she is beautiful, as you would see if you didn't arrange the lighting in your sitting-room so that it looked as if you were expecting Banquo to dinner."

"Are you in love with her or something?" said Thornton.

"Desmond, you ought to know by now that the doctors forbid me those vulgar emotions. No, we are united by art. When not engaged in more frivolous pursuits—I must inform you at this point that she is very well born though not now, I fear, very well connected—she translates Russian books which I am happy to recommend to the firm which employs me."

"I didn't know that any Russian books were published in Spain."

"Oh yes, there is Tolstoy; there will soon be Gogol, too."

"I should like to know Russian," said Thornton, impressed.

"I dare say she wouldn't mind knowing it either. Fortunately, it isn't necessary. Her brother is a diplomat and has done very well for himself with the aid of a rich wife and some appalling French. The whole family have a talent for improvisation and so I suppose one wet evening when she had no invitations she said to herself: '*Why not me, too?*' . . . her *War and Peace* is a comic masterpiece. She took it from the French version, which itself was taken from the English translation."

Thornton laughed. "José," he said, gazing at Beltran's melancholy face, the face of a Watteau puerrot, of Gilles himself, "José, you know too much about everybody."

"I know another thing which makes it even more amusing,"

said Beltran. "It's the reason I go about with her. In the first days of the Civil War her uncle was taken out of Barcelona and shot, and d'you know that I'm almost certain that it was I, personally, who shot him, though of course it's difficult after all these years to remember every name, and somewhat indiscreet to talk about such matters."

"Yes," said Thornton, "I can understand that that must make it most intriguing for you."

"Then shall we go and join the ladies, Desmond? They must be getting on so well together."

In point of fact during dinner, and with the aid of wine, the atmosphere became more cordial: Dominique's duties as hostess obliging her to suspend hostilities which she would certainly have renewed in one form or another, if only because her husband, normally morose in company, talked almost exclusively to his feminine guest, whose physical appearance he showed evidence of admiring considerably.

The pair stayed until well after midnight, and José Beltran told everybody's fortune—even Pepita's—prophesying dark men, daggers, and constant lapses in moral conduct for all concerned; a nunnery as eventual destination for Dominique and the Presidency of a resuscitated Catalan Republic for himself.

As was their custom, the Thorntons went down with their guests to the front door, the women in one lift, the men in the other.

"You made a very good recovery," said Dominique, later, when they were undressing.

"Oh, did I?"

"Yes, quite remarkable. It's so like you to put yourself out for strangers."

"I thought she was rather a nice woman," he said, removing a sock.

"Will you never learn to fold your trousers neatly?" said Dominique. "Pepita has to spend more time on your clothes than Geneviève's and mine put together."

"Perhaps that is because I'm the largest of the three of us?"

He did not want to argue now: only to sleep. Yet, when she put out the light, and lay still, waiting for her moment, he turned, and laid his hand upon her breast.

"It isn't quite winter yet," said Dominique. "I don't need you as a hot water bottle."

"No, I'm sure you don't."

"Do you know what that woman said to me in the lift? She said: '*I can see that your husband is very much in love with you.*' And she spoke with a nasty, bitter envy in her voice."

"I *am* very much in love with you," said Thornton. "She was right."

He turned and faced the patch of night where night was lightest, by the window, with its *Persiennes* raised an inch or two, so that the moon could peep upon the compass set, two pairs of unjoined legs.

Three

"It has seemed to me appropriate to speak of certain temptations which, as I have observed, often attack beginners—I have had some of them myself—and to give counsel about matters which appear to me necessary. There are so many people who think that devotion will slip away from them if they relax even a little."

Barry Keating laid aside Saint Teresa of Avila, leaving a tooth-pick athwart the middle of her thirteenth chapter. He put Saint Teresa down on the stool, and he picked up *Don Quixote*, which he had now read, as he had read the Bible, six times, in its entirety. "Narciso," he said in a loud voice, "Narciso"; the man's name pleased him. .

"Me voy, me voy, señor."

There had been bed-bugs in this cell before, but now there were none. On the day after his arrival Barry had lodged a formal protest with the Prison Governor. This, and the three adjoining cells, to which Barry had access, had been sprayed with formalin. The legs of his bed, even those of the wicker chairs which had been specially provided for his use, now stood in petrol tins containing paraffin. Barry was a prisoner of mark.

"Narciso," he repeated, "*Narciso*."

He listened to the old man grunting as he unlocked the door which separated these four cells from the general body of the prison. In the days of the Republic, even in those of the Monarchy, these had been the condemned cells. Here murderers had awaited the last dawn springing golden, beyond the river; and the

steel embrace of the *garotte*. But with the Civil War and the casual, although invariably urbane, ferocity of Queipo de Llano, who had governed this city throughout that conflict, the four condemned cells had seemed somewhat ridiculous as accommodation for the doomed, though administrative routine had attempted to follow the regulations, crowding twenty-five men, and sometimes even thirty, into each cell until it had been discovered that altogether too many were liable to a death by suffocation during the last night, thus cheating both the bullets and the priest come to save their souls. The priest, in fact, was so often required to administer the rites of extreme unction that he had seldom been able to fulfil satisfactorily his true mission: the submission of the sinful to the inscrutability of the Almighty's will.

"La vida es como un perro: ladra delante y muere detras." Life is like a dog: he barks in front of you, bites when you turn your back. Only two coats of whitewash had been applied to the walls of the cell within the last fifteen years. The coats of whitewash had been laid thinly. This inscription, therefore, was perfectly visible, and beside and around it were dozens of others—signatures, brief expressions of belief in the happy and civilising mission of the Soviet Union, of hatred of Franco, of ultimate love for Mama, of complaint concerning the food provided by the prison commissariat.

The old warder, Narciso, entered the cell. As immense as a Bismarck, he needed but an old-fashioned mackintosh, a couple of dogs, and the drip of trees in a rain-sodden wood to complete the Friedrichsruhe illusion. He had been first employed in this prison as a junior warder concerned more particularly with the daily sortie from cells of buckets of slop and filth. Four years later, this apprenticeship accomplished, he had been given charge of an entire gallery. That had been in the time of the Monarchy: the five-year Republic had seen no reason to change the existing state of affairs, the work being ill-paid and, consequently, in small demand among place seekers. When the Civil War began, the city had declared for Franco immediately. Certain warders, found guilty of brutality towards Falangist prisoners, had been shot. Not so Narciso, who was generally recognised to have dispensed the daily soup with an impartial ladle. Confirmed in his functions, he had exercised them throughout the war itself, the

subsequent period of reprisals, and now, when conditions approaching normalcy obtained, he had reached the rank of Assistant Chief Warder. He would retire next year.

"I've brought the flowers," he said, and laid the carnations on the table.

"Put them in the vase," said Barry.

Narciso did so. "Would you like the barber?" he said. "You ought to get that beard trimmed."

"Let me grow my beard my own way," said Barry. "I haven't had a chance to since the war."

"It is a mistake to grow a beard," said Narciso. He began to arrange the flowers, cutting the stalks carefully with his penknife so that all should be of equal length. "Your beard is blond, I agree, and therefore unusual, but you look none the less like a *gitano*, and for a gentleman that is bad. Besides, in another week or two it will begin to chafe. Then you will suffer."

"How do you know I am a *caballero*?" said Barry.

"They only put *caballeros* and important people in this special set of cells," said Narciso. "The last one we had here, two years ago, was General Kindelan." The flowers arranged, he filled the vase with water. "I often wonder what became of him."

"He's dead," said Barry.

"That can't be true." Narciso was shocked. "He was a famous man in the war. They wouldn't do a thing like that. When he left here I was told he was being transferred to the Carabanchel, near Madrid."

"So he was," said Barry. "But they let him out soon afterwards. Then he died of heart failure. Perhaps it was just as well: he would have died of boredom otherwise."

"I can't understand what he could have done," said Narciso. "A well-known man like that."

"He objected to apprentice pilots learning to fly in fifteen-year-old German training machines," said Barry.

"Oh?" said Narciso. He knew, of course, that differences of opinion sometimes occurred in Government circles: only a few months previously Señor Ruiz Gallarza, whose name had been most prominently featured in connection with Catholic Economic Planning, had spent a week in this prison, and in a common cell, too: but that had evidently been a misunderstanding, for when released his speeches had continued to appear in

the newspapers: though no longer, it was true, upon the front pages.

"And you?" he said now. "You . . . what have you done?" He had never dared to put this question plainly to Barry before, but now the moment seemed propitious.

"Oh, something very similar," said Barry. "As a matter of fact I just couldn't see my way to becoming Minister of Agriculture, in spite of their entreaties."

"You must always have your joke," grumbled Narciso. "I dare say, when the truth comes out we shall find *that* was what brought you here." He pointed to the floor, which was abundantly littered with cigarette butts and crumbs of bread. "Although you are a privileged prisoner, you must still clean your quarters," he said reprovingly, and handed Barry the broom. "Do you want anything from the canteen?"

"A bottle of sherry. Some stuffed olives, and a tin of cascara pills," said Barry. "I don't know how the other prisoners manage but your rice is like cement to me. Yes, I know," he raised a hand as the warder was about to interrupt. "I'm only allowed to spend fifty *pesetas* a day, but all this will come to much less, and you can keep the change."

When the man had gone, locking the outer door behind him, Barry picked up his Saint Teresa. He walked down the passage. Of the three other cells available for his use in what was, in effect, a private suite, and of which the doors stood open, Barry inhabited only the third and last. In this one he had caused Narciso to instal a chair and a table, together with such of his personal possessions as he did not wish to keep by his bedside; for example his clothes, all neatly suspended on hangers from nails, his writing paper and the large collection of maps of all parts of Europe which he carried with him everywhere, and which he never became tired of studying, much as other people, when travelling, take with them their favourite books, and small ornaments or *fetiches*.

The passage-way, in which Barry paused for a moment, was not really a passage at all, but, rather, part of a gallery, running the entire length of the second floor of the prison. In front of his own four cells a brick wall had, at some period, been added, but elsewhere the gallery was open, bordered by an iron taffrail, and offering a view not only of the assembly hall thirty feet below, but

also of a similar gallery, opposite. Both galleries were lined with cells. One of Barry's first actions on the night of his imprisonment, a month before, had been to bore a hole in the brick wall with a spoon. The field of vision thus obtained was restricted but, for Barry's purpose, which was purely recreational, sufficient. He looked through the hole now but this was the mid-morning, always a dull hour, and there was little activity to be observed. An old man, opposite, whom he knew to be serving a thirty-year term for bank robbery, stooped, broom in hand, to caress the prison cat. A pair of booted feet came into view and a warder's voice ordered the old man to get on with his sweeping. Apart from these things there was nothing to be seen. All inmates of the prison who were neither sick nor undergoing special punishment were now at work.

Entering the fourth cell, Barry drew his table to the window, and mounted. From this vantage point he obtained an excellent view both of the Guadalquivir and of the Triana suburb, beyond the river. On a clear day, such as this one, he could see far beyond the last houses of the suburb, across the flat plain where the bulls were bred; a plain so barren and so endless that sometimes he found it difficult to realise that, a bare forty miles distant, somewhere in that blue haze of heat, lay San Lucar, and the sea.

He turned as Narciso entered, jingling many keys.

"A nice day," he said.

"You can't pull the wool over my eyes with that nonsense," said Narciso. "You were signalling to that girl of yours."

"Come now, Narciso," said Barry reproachfully. "You know quite well she always goes out shopping for her mother in the morning."

Barry had made the ocular and long-distance acquaintance of a young woman who lived in a house on the quay, about a hundred yards away, and on the near-side of the river. Evidently she had been favourably impressed by the view of his head and shoulders, and of such gestures as he had been able to make while balanced precariously on his rickety table, for she had now reached a stage when she would appear upon her balcony as many as five times a day; ostensibly to water geraniums, but in reality to observe him more closely through a pair of field glasses.

"Well, there's no time for that nonsense now," said Narciso.

“Hop down off there at once and have a wash and brush up. The Governor wants to see you.”

“Is that so?” said Barry. “But I’m not sure that I want to see the Governor.” He watched a barge come into view, hauling upstream, and making for the central arch of the Arjona bridge.

“*Por Dios*, Señor Keating,” said Narciso. “Don’t you give me enough trouble as it is? Now, if you don’t clean yourself, they’ll say I’ve stolen your soap.”

“Oh, I’m sure that’s one thing they’d never suspect,” said Barry. “However, to oblige an old friend, I’ll do it.” He jumped down, rinsed his hands, then his face, combed his hair. “I can do nothing with the beard at present,” he said. “All right—lead on; and don’t touch that sherry while I’m away.”

Narciso unlocked the main door. They walked side by side along the gallery. The old man with the broom had completed his stint and, leaning against the taffrail by the doors which gave access to the staircase, was languidly spitting at the cat. As Barry passed the convict winked at him.

“Soon be Christmas now,” he said.

“Shut your mouth,” said Narciso. At the door of the Governor’s office he knocked, waited until the invitation to enter had been repeated a second time, then pushed Barry forward: “Now remember,” he said, “don’t make him start to fuss, whatever you do, or he’ll invent some new standing orders. I’ll wait outside.”

Barry entered the office, which was pleasantly furnished, though presenting rather the appearance of a private library than of a prison bureau: a fact which was not altogether surprising since Don Esteban Gallangos, the Governor, had at one time, and for many years, been a Professor of History at Salamanca University. From that post he had been removed—none knew upon what grounds, though to those who suggested that they had been those of political unreliability the well-informed would reply with a knowing wink, maintaining that the explanation was more personal, more scandalous, involving not the Professor himself but rather a member of his family: his wife, said some; a daughter, others.

The Professor had remained for several years unemployed and, since the only people with whose habits and mode of life he was intimately acquainted were the Visigoths, unemployable. Then,

one day, at a time when prison reform was being seriously discussed, someone in Madrid had suggested that a great step in the right direction might be taken by the removal of military men from the summits of the penal hierarchy, and their replacement by enlightened members of the liberal professions. This proposition had been accepted. Don Esteban had been one of the first appointments made under the new policy—and if the well-informed whispered, once again, that he owed this good fortune, also, to his wife (or daughter), then that was surely no more than justice if it were true that one or both of them had brought calamity upon him in Salamanca.

In appearance, Don Esteban presented a perfect example of the dry and bilious type of Castilian—the other offers an austere rotundity—of which the principal characteristic are a dry and parchment skin, premature baldness, delicate bone structure, and soft brown eyes.

He had met Barry once before: on the night of the latter's arrival, when in a brief interview the Governor had been able to satisfy his own curiosity concerning this unusual prisoner while ostensibly explaining to him the conditions under which he would be incarcerated. A month had passed since then, and Don Esteban was quite unprepared for Barry's beard. He rose now, indicated a chair, then, seating himself, stared at the beard as if fascinated by it.

"Have they taken your razor?" he said. "I gave orders that you were to be allowed to retain possession of it."

"I am growing this for pleasure and to pass the time," said Barry. Then, seeing the Governor glance as if for confirmation towards a corner, he looked himself in that direction and perceived that a second man was present whom he had not until now noticed, for with the Persian blinds lowered the light was dim, a filtered green in which flies swam.

"This gentleman has come from Madrid to see you," said Don Esteban. He turned again towards the corner. "You would prefer to speak with him alone, no doubt?" he said.

"I would," said the man in the corner. His voice was deep and resonant.

"In that case I will leave you." Don Esteban rose. He turned to Barry. "If you have any complaints I shall be glad to hear them afterwards."

"I have no complaints," said Barry.

"I shall be in the next room," said Don Esteban. "If you need me you have only to press that bell upon my desk."

"I shall not need you," said the man in the corner.

When the Governor had gone he advanced, sat down in the vacant chair behind the desk, pushed aside, with an expression of distaste, the various neat piles of paper with which the desk was covered; then producing other papers from a brief-case, laid them upon the shagreen-bordered blotting pad. He performed those actions slowly, and when they were completed, he cut and lit a cigar.

"Would you like one, too?" he said.

"No," said Barry. He studied the man, whom he had seen before; several times in Tangiers and once, at a particularly awkward juncture for himself, in Albacete. Barry had never spoken to this man but he knew several of his names, including his real name, which was Aranjuez, like the town near Madrid, which contains a royal palace.

"You are wrong not to smoke a cigar," said Aranjuez amiably. "They are Brazilian. Very likely these are even part of a consignment which you handled yourself."

"I give orders," said Barry. "I don't touch the merchandise personally."

"I agree that you are too fine a navigator in troubled waters to be employed as a mere stevedore," said Aranjuez. The papers which he had removed from his brief-case and laid upon the blotting pad appeared to consist of loose sheets. Their total height, stacked above the green drinker of ink, might be about an inch and a half. Barry stared at them.

"Why don't you tack them all together?" he said. "There are clips specially designed for the purpose."

"Oh, they live in a steel drawer, you know," said Aranjuez. "Now they're on holiday . . . a little trip to the south: why should they want to run away?" His fingers felt among the papers, found the one which he required, laid it on top; swivelled, for Barry to see. It was a photograph, pasted beneath a Ministry of the Interior heading, of Barry, his father and mother, and a man named Leeson, sitting in the lounge of the Hotel Atlantic, in Tangiers.

"I hope this isn't the old emotional approach," said Barry.

"My mother's hair may be white, but she has it dyed blue every second week. Neither of them care, and even if they did, I wouldn't care about it."

"You surprise me," said Aranjuez. "At a time when English people are subjected to so many currency restrictions you have shown, year after year, unflinching kindness to your aged parents. Summer after summer, certain unimportant friends of mine have watched them embark at Algeciras, proceed to some good vantage point and stare in wonder at the torrid coasts of Africa where their son is nature's and the ladies' favourite." Aranjuez said all this mellifluously, as if he enjoyed saying it—which in fact he did—but as he reached the last word he paused: then continued, in quite another tone of voice, a sharper voice: "Perhaps Mr. Leeson cares, then? Do say he cares. I would not like to feel that you had been entirely abandoned."

"Leeson is too big a man to care," said Barry. "He has other worries."

"But this is practically an admission, Señor Philipopolis," said Aranjuez. "So you agree that the bone I have to pick with you . . . you were gnawing it alone, or, shall we say, as a little sideline?"

"I admit nothing," said Barry. It was now his turn to pause. He gazed at Aranjuez with much facial evidence of intense dislike. "That was an exceptionally dirty trick you played on me," he said. "Couldn't you have waited until I came to Spain as, God knows, I do often enough? Couldn't you have had me kidnapped, if it comes to that? Your strong-arm men are strong enough in numbers, even if they do lack guts. To get me to Tarifa by pretending that an engineer aboard a boat was ill, and required an immediate operation, was both clumsy and despicable."

"I am sorry that you should think that," replied Aranjuez. "Yet if you examine the matter calmly, perhaps you will find that it is yourself rather than my organisation whom you are accusing. I adopt the methods most likely to result, with the least fuss, in your capture. If these methods are in bad taste, that is not my fault. In your profession, as in mine, sentimentality is a perversion which invites the prison walls and, in due course, the bullet."

"You understand that I'm only talking to you because it makes a change in a dull day," said Barry. His beard was tickling

him. He rubbed at it with the round side of an index finger.

"I understand perfectly," replied Aranjuez. "Shall we now proceed, like all good duellists, to the preliminary flourishes?"

"As you please," said Barry. He watched his opponent's long, slender, somewhat crooked fingers as they caressed the pile of papers. The face above the fingers was impassive: hair cropped short to stubble length, high cheekbones, dark and melancholy eyes, a wide, thin mouth, a mouth even sweet to see when tranquil, yet of which the corners seemed made for the downward twist, sudden, of derision: a chin so deeply cleft that the two sides of the face were not one whole, but, rather, two wings joined, flaps of a fireguard set before a hidden flame. It was said of Aranjuez that, in private life, he was a man happily married, with seven children. It was said also that, like Franco himself, he had waited thirteen years to obtain from an obstinate father the hand in marriage of the woman whom he loved. And it was said that this was one reason why the intruder in the Pardo liked him, preferring him by many interviews to the young men who had sprung haphazard from the Corps of Army Staffs, working for their women's mink; preferred him even to the generals, such as Munoz Grande, who had tried to fight the Riff War against Russia. And it was said, too, that Aranjuez had intervened, and from his unguent point of view successfully, in the interminable negotiations with both the Vatican and with the United States of North America. What Aranjuez actually thought of his master nobody knew, except perhaps the master himself.

"Name?" said Aranjuez, quite suddenly.

"Dmitri Philipopoulis," replied Barry.

"You are a Greek citizen. You were naturalised in 1948. By birth you are British. You were baptised Barry Spencer Keating."

"You can forget the Spencer," said Barry. "At that time the cinema was not so popular. The British middle classes were bent upon a close acquaintance with the ancient feudal families."

"You reached the rank of Captain in the British Army, during your war," said Aranjuez. "You served first in Commando troops, then were attached to the Airborne Division. Later, in Athens, in December 1944, during the troubles caused by Communists, you deserted?"

"After those troubles, if you don't mind putting it that way?" said Barry.

"Very well. Then, after various adventures, including, I, believe, a spell of sponge-fishing in Rhodes, you proceeded to Tunis, and in due course to Tangiers?"

"Surely facts like these must be available to any man in carpet slippers warming his toes before a fire?" said Barry.

"I have no doubt they are," said Aranjuez, "but, as I told you at the outset, this is the straight interrogation, laid down as gospel by rule 12' of *Seguridad* standing orders." He looked straight at Barry, brown eye delving blue eye. "Why don't you give in?" he said.

"I don't like giving in," said Barry. "Especially when such a clever man as you makes the sortie."

"I'm not being clever," said Aranjuez. "I'm being nailed upon a notice-board, and made to do this." He wetted his under-finger, ran it down the page of typescript. This was one of his small, household gestures and, several times, Barry had watched him wipe the front, picture page of papers in Tangiers in the same manner.

"Come along with it," he said.

"In Tangiers," said Aranjuez, "owing to your possession of a yacht and your natural ability, you obtained immediate and profitable employment. In two years you have made more than a hundred trips from that port to the French and Italian coasts with various cargoes, all of them contraband. You have £11,000 in three Swiss banks."

"Well, what about it?"

"There would be nothing about it, nothing at all, if you had not decided to become ambitious beyond your station," said Aranjuez. "I would even overlook the fact that you have a depot in Minorca had you stuck to your work with Leeson. Why didn't you stick to that?"

"A man likes a change," said Barry.

"Possibly. But that kind of change is dangerous. You should not interfere in politics, my friend. We have in our zone of Morocco one of our last remaining overseas possessions. Each square yard of each of those unfriendly mountains was paid for in blood. It is not our fault if our French-neighbours should have allowed the population of their larger and more prosperous zone to get completely out of hand. To the Arab, to the Berber, the idea of political liberty is quaint and charming . . . not unlike

the magic carpet, quite as inaccessible, and almost as precarious when considered as a seat. Thirty years ago we had, as a counter to Millan Astray, in our zone, the great Lyautey next door. Now there is nothing . . . little men from Paris, local nabobs anxious for their rights, and the all-persuasive Yankees employing the diplomatic methods of Huckleberry Finn. And with that, arms, arms . . . the clumsy deposition of a Sultan concerning which we are not even consulted . . . then arms again, the rise of movements like the Istaglal, mortar bombs of which Arabs put the wrong end in the barrels, grenades concerning which they seem unaware that the explosive delay is seven seconds, if one is to judge by the mangled bodies found in back streets. You have provided some of those arms, and that is why I have had no choice but to hold you."

"Very well," said Barry. "And now, what?"

"I shall see that you receive between five and seven years imprisonment . . . probably in Spanish Guinea."

"You really mean that?"

"Yes, I mean it . . . certainly."

"Why don't you get rid of me the old, obituary way if that's how you feel about it?"

"Because it would be sordid and unnecessary. As you are perhaps aware, mosquito nets are scarce in Rio Muni. There are also other ailments than that provided by the anopheles mosquito."

"You make my blood run tepid," said Barry. "Are you telling me that, from a social leper, you propose to convert me into a real one?" He smiled at Aranjuez. "Well, I never did have a negress but I suppose it is not too late to start. I've heard they smell of musk: is that correct?"

"I think you'll be so tired in the evenings that the question will seem to you entirely academic," said Aranjuez. He smoothed his pile of papers. "Don't be amusing, Mr. Keating. We are having a charming conversation, but I promise you that I mean business."

"Oh, I'm sure you do."

"I could also have you sent back to England to face that delightful desertion charge."

"No. At this stage, I fear not," said Barry. "And then . . . what would be the point: you'd lose me, wouldn't you?"

Both men were silent for some moments, examining each other

studiously. Then: "I'm glad to see," said Aranjuez, "that you can take a hint, Mr. Keating."

"Well now," replied Barry, "I never did imagine that you came all the way from Madrid merely to explain the charms of equatorial Africa to me."

"You were approached by the Italians in 1951," said Aranjuez. From among his pile of papers he selected one, and turned it round for Barry to examine.

"Under the letter-heading of a well-known Milan manufacturer of milk chocolate. I trust you observe," observed Barry.

"They also approached you personally, one hopes?"

"Naturally. You people have earned your money."

"Why don't you work for us?" said Aranjuez gently.

"Don't be silly," said Barry.

"You think it is silly?"

"Yes, I do. Aren't there enough people running round the world making *resumés* of science fiction press cuttings, for Czechoslovak and British Embassies? The only thing which could ever make me work for you might be the prospect of teaching your men how to search a hotel bedroom properly, and to wash their hands before they start the job. When they'd got through looking for that letter I had to send all my shirts to the laundry again."

"I am quite serious, you know," said Aranjuez. "It is one thing or the other."

"I am quite serious, too," said Barry. "And I'm staying here."

"You are obliging me to behave ungraciously," said Aranjuez. "I shall dislike you for this."

"I am afraid that I do not wish to be the tickle given by the index finger of the long arm and hand of Spain," said Barry. "You are a delightful people. You have recently organised two bomb explosions in the Lebanon, and a manifesto, one of many, by the Mufti of Jerusalem, in Cairo. It is not my fault if your employer, for want of any other means of self-expression, should wish to show himself as the Protector of Islam . . ."

"Now I am becoming truly annoyed," said Aranjuez. "You seem to forget your situation, Señor Keating."

"I don't forget it for a second, old chap, but there's nothing doing. You want it straight? All right, you can have it: you can

go and put your idea where the absent-minded squirrel put the nuts."

Aranjuez was silent for a moment. His cigar had long been cold, unlit. He now laid the extinct remnant in an ashtray. "I dislike saying what I am about to say," he said. "None the less, however, I will say it. There are laws of nature. Yes. I do feel that those laws exist. It is time—yes, the time has come—when you must pay, Keating."

"Is that really so?" said Barry. "How very interesting."

"You have very little chance against me, Keating. You will see that," said Aranjuez.

"Well, my dear fellow, it's hardly my fault if, finding yourself on top, you find the top uncomfortable to sit upon," said Barry. "You wished to be charming . . . a Metternich in his easier moments, admitting that it was all a horrible mistake about the arrangements for the Parma duchy. I can't allow you that small glory. Nobody wins against me when I don't want them to. You are very clever, very brave. In many ways I much admire you, but I can promise you that on this job, even with a whole state behind you, you're going to lose, and I'm going to make you admit it, too."

"Yes," said Aranjuez, "I start off with the advantages, and I agree they are a handicap . . . but I warn you that I shall have those four cells closed, one by one, until you're left with just the place in which you sleep and the eight steps up and down the parquet." He replaced his papers in his grip. "I shall call again in two weeks' time," he said.

"Don't get into trouble upon my account for your expenses," said Barry.

"Good-bye, Mr. Keating," said Aranjuez.

The pair shook hands.

"This is very funny," said Barry. "You must need me badly."

"I confess that I should like to see your organisational abilities put to better use," replied Aranjuez. He paused. "I am not a stupid man, and so I do not propose to restrict your right to make purchases from the canteen, for example, but, concerning the cells, I am in earnest. I shall have the first one closed to-day."

"Close one in the middle, then. I have a good view of a young lady from the end one," said Barry.

"I'm very glad you told me," said Aranjuez. "That cell will

remain open. Let us hope that what you see will remind you of the delights of liberty."

Four

SOMEBODY HAD BROUGHT A STOOL and set it down beside the wooden balcony which ran in a half circle round the riding ring. Perched upon this stool, Barbara could see everything that happened thirty feet beneath her. She was very conscious, however, that she was the only child among several dozen adults, who might well be watching, and she did not wish, by some display of emotion or enthusiasm, to embarrass her stepmother, who was at that moment jumping. Barbara watched the hooves of the horse beat and kick the earth as he advanced. Then the horse flexed his muscles, rose, and inside Barbara something flexed and rose at the same time—but only for a moment, because then the horse was over, and scudding in a turn towards the left.

•The horse halted. The riding master approached. He spoke, and, evidently, what he said was amiable, because Barbara saw Dominique smile as she dismounted, handing the bridle to a groom. Barbara gazed in admiration at her stepmother and in most admiration of all at two large brown curls which had fallen across her forehead and which now swung, one way or the other, with each word that she spoke.

And Barbara examined, with contempt, novices—men among them—who were exercising lesser and no doubt more amenable animals around the borders of the ring. Barbara saw Dominique raise her head and smile at her and Barbara smiled in return; and with the sidelong, lidded glance of which small girls alone possess the secret, she examined her neighbours, mostly gentlemen in, hexagonally shaped riding breeches: to see if they had noticed this all-important exchange of amenities.

Presently, Dominique, who had disappeared below, now emerged upstairs and touched Barbara upon the shoulder.

"I'm just going to take a shower, and change, darling; will you wait for me?"

"Yes, Maman."

A young man came up to Barbara. "Would you like a lemonade?" he said to her, in English.

"No, thank you," replied Barbara distinctly.

"Perhaps you would like an ice, then?"

"You speak English very badly," said Barbara.

"That may be so," said the young man. "But you do not speak Spanish at all."

"I have only been here six days," said Barbara. "But I shall learn, and then I shall speak it better than you." She would have preferred to have said something more striking, more bitter, because she disliked being approached by strangers in this way, and at this moment, when all seemed lost, it occurred to her that she could well say something quite devastating; and so she said it:

"But I shall never speak *Catalan* at all," she said, laying the full weight of her nine years on the noun.

"Then you will miss all the nice things that gentlemen will say about you in trams," replied the young man, and he turned towards his friends, the better to enjoy their laughter.

An uncomfortable silence ensued, somewhat attenuated by the soft cllop of horses' hooves in the soft earth below.

"But they will still try and rub against me in trams, won't they, as soon as I'm grown up?" said Barbara. She had seen a man attempting to perform this manoeuvre, in the general direction of her stepmother, only one hour previously, and, although the incident had appeared to her at the time so shameful that, in the normal way, it could not possibly have been discussed in public, she now perceived that it might be useful, even salutary, as a means of terminating a most disagreeable conversation.

The effect of her words upon those present was, indeed, all that she might have hoped; but the young man, her original antagonist, was not to be deterred, and his was the concluding and conclusive repique. "Let us hope, my dear," he said, "that when you are as old as that, money will have been made available so that you may use uniquely private cars, or taxis."

The further uncomfortable silence which ensued was relieved by the arrival of Dominique herself, bathed, changed and radiant.

"Well, darling, did you like it?"

"Very much, Maman."

"I jumped well, didn't I? I *did* jump well. Or didn't I?" A

murmur of polite and unanimous approval, from the right, replied to her question. "I thought you were very *sage*, Maman," said Barbara.

Dominique looked puzzled. "Sage?" she said, and then, in Spanish: "What can the child mean?" She looked at Barbara suspiciously:

"What *do* you mean, Barbara?" this time in French.

"*Sage et belle*," said Barbara, but her face was white. All those eyes, those eyes; *hers* too, hers above all, those truly black ones.

"It isn't '*sage et belle*' she means but '*belle, mais quand-même sage*,'" said someone at the back of the crowd along the balcony.

"Barbara, would you like an ice?" said Dominique.

"The young lady has already scornfully refused an ice," said the same voice.

"Darling, it's past eight o'clock, and you look tired," said Dominique. "I think it's time that you went home."

"I think so, too," said the same voice again.

Dominique looked in the direction of that voice. "Will you shut up!" she said. The offender's head took refuge behind the shoulder of a larger man.

• "I'll get you a taxi, darling," said Dominique. "Come." She took Barbara's hand, escorted her along the passage towards the office where the club secretaries worked. "Would you mind getting this little girl a taxi," she said to one of them. "Certainly, señora." "Good-bye, darling," said Dominique. She gave the woman the address. "Tell Papa I'll be back at ten."

The street was dark. There were fresh horse-droppings on the pavement by the entrance to the riding school. Barbara stared at them and wondered why they smoked. Presently the taxi came, and she climbed into it, refusing the secretary's aid.

"You can take me the long way round," she said to the driver in French. "I have plenty of money."

"Do you think everybody here knows French?" said the taxi-driver, in that language.

"No, I don't," said Barbara. "But you have the French flag on your window."

"That's for tourists," said the taxi-driver. "It doesn't mean a thing. Even *Murcians* carry it, and the only foreign language they know is Arabic." He looked at Barbara intently. "If the address that woman gave me is right, you must be

Señor Thornton's girl," he said, "I've heard a lot about you."

"Do you know my father?" said Barbara.

"Do I know him? Kiddle? You're joking. I've known him two years. I'm his best friend in the working-class world."

"Then take me the long way round," said Barbara.

"It's heredity, that's what it is," said the taxi-driver. "Lucky thing for you, you haven't got his complexion, though."

* * * *

"Go on," said Dominique. "I want to hear more about it."

"There is nothing to tell," said the young man uncomfortably. His name was Paco Llanereras. He was the same young man who had offered Barbara first lemonade, and then an ice.

"Don't be stupid," said Dominique. "You say it lasted four years. There must be some way of describing it. Describe just one day in each year . . . a day you'd be bound to remember . . . Christmas Day, for example. What did you give her? What did she say?"

"Oh, she never said much, you know—never."

They were standing at the end of the bar, half sheltered from the public view by a spread of bulrushes set in a great green vase. From beyond the balcony came the sound of man and horse in pantomime.

"Why did you never tell me this before?" said Dominique.

"Why should I tell you? Everybody in Barcelona knows it. I thought you knew, too." He raised his glass, which contained sherry, then replaced it upon the counter. "I've lived with it for a long time, you know," he said humbly.

"I haven't lived with it," said Dominique. "I want to know."

"Very well," he said, "very well, you shall know—but only you, and when you know, you must accept the consequences."

"You're such a good rider," said Dominique. "Why must you be so silly off the saddle?"

"I wasn't silly then . . ." he said. "I don't regret a day of it."

"Then go on, for God's sake. I said I'd be home at ten."

"I loved her," he said. "I loved her and went away with her. It was almost the only positive thing I've ever done. I broke the rules. You know the rules: you've seen them working. That's why everybody was so pleased, so happy when it ended. Particularly my father."

Dominique knew the rules. The sons of Catalan industrialists are reared in chastity and sloth. Their regional accent, an acoustic horror, is ineradicable by reason of the constant practice of their local language, which some have praised as beautiful in print, which indeed it is, but of which no man has ever said that it was lovely in the human mouth.

The woman had been, it seemed, a dancer, half a *gitana*, half—though that half more suspect—the daughter of an Italian count. Lllavaneras had first seen her dancing, with her heaped skirt, frilled and quivering, just below her knees.

Victorian England and Imperial France, each of these societies are so entirely extinct that they are no longer the subject of even literary satire; yet the habits and the prejudices which prevailed in them may be observed, from life, to-day, in the one Iberian enclave populated by the noisy heirs of Greece and Rome. Money! Not so much the things which money buys but the power which wealth confers in a community which has forgotten art, despised comfort, disdains leisure. The great families of Catalunya are of recent origin. The fathers of their grandfathers strode the barren hills in *espadrilles*, tending vines, scything the meagre wheat, or driving goats before them. This is the only region of Spain in which a middle class exists and it is a class as puissant as were, in their day, the merchants of the Hanseatic League.

"I wanted to study medicine," he said, "but of course my father wouldn't let me. My youngest brother is a surgeon to-day, a respected and a happy man and, what's more important, a free one. But I had to go into the factory. The first two brothers always do."

"And if there aren't enough children?" said Dominique.

"Don't worry. There are always cousins."

Cheap labour, even cheaper electrical power, the fortunate geographical situation of the greatest port in the Mediterranean basin: these are the factors which have built up, if not the greatest, at least the most secure textile industry in Europe. Five thousand families, at the most, control it. A nobility exists but it is largely imported from Iberia proper, and designed to give lustre to the night-club and the marriage bed; not for the direction of serious commercial enterprise.

"I ran away with her to the Canaries," said Lllavaneras. "Not to any of the larger islands, but to Gomera, the smallest of them

all and the most primitive.” He looked beyond the bulrushes. No one was listening. “I knew the combination of my father’s safe. I took 200,000 *pesetas* with me. In those days, that was money.”

“What did your father do?” she asked. But she did not need to ask; she knew. Those people always waited. They could afford to wait. If the young man had fled to Madrid, instead of overseas, the father would have had him brought back to Barcelona under police escort, but without scandal. Such things can be arranged in Spain. In Barcelona, where the philosophy of Anarchy first found expression in two manifestos and a home-made bomb, the poor have shed much blood to no avail, and money talks in a persuasive whisper.

“It didn’t take long—less than a year,” he said, “for us both to become very bored: she of me, myself of the sun, the flies and the endless afternoons. My father must have known that this would happen .

Yes, thought Dominique, the father must have known. His life was a time-table. The five thousand families spend the month of August by the sea, but on the last day of that month they leave the beaches to the proletariat and the foreign tourists, for custom decrees that September must be spent at least two thousand feet above sea level. By October they are back at work—that is to say, once more resident in the great city—for, in reality, they have never ceased to work and, however distant from it, have made at least four weekly visits to their seat of business. In the matter of their holidays, as in all else, the families follow a protocol as rigorous as that to which Royalty is subjected.

“You might think that in a remote island it would take a long time to get through so much money,” said Llaneras, “but you would be wrong. A man can get through a million in a month if he’s really bored, and be just as bored at the end of it, when he gives the last banknote to the last waiter.”

“What happened?” said Dominique.

• “Have some more sherry?”

“No. What happened?”

“Love,” he said. “It’s very nice. Just like honey, and like honey, too, it’s better with bread. Also, if the pot’s always open, the flies get in.”

“You can always pick them out with a knife,” said Dominique.

"Yes, and what a mess it makes, doesn't it: all over your fingers, all over the table. Sometimes we used to go across to Santa Cruz, but not often, because we never knew who we might meet there. For exercise I had my riding, of course, but even that wasn't very satisfactory. There are too many walls in Gomera, and so we usually fell back on love . . . on love and her favourite vice."

"And what was that?"

"Cocaine! There was always plenty to be had in Santa Cruz and Las Palmas." He paused. "I *must* have another sherry," he said, and called the barman, but when he had received his drink he did not touch it. "She used to lay it very gently on the back of my neck, in ice," he said.

"Is it effective like that?"

"Oh, most." He was watching Dominique's face. "You mustn't think she was really depraved or anything like that," he said. "She didn't even use it to excess, and with that particular drug—I don't know about others—great will-power is needed to keep yourself under control."

"And you didn't, of course."

"No."

"What was she like?"

"I don't know what you mean. What is anybody like? With me she was one person, with somebody else she was somebody different. We rented a farm, and tried to work it. She enjoyed that at first. She hadn't had much fun in life. She had always wanted to be happy, domesticated."

"So did Marie Antoinette," said Dominique. "But I don't want to hear about poultry . . . what did she *look* like?"

"Rather like you," he said.

"Ah?"

"But older and harder, and much more desperate."

"Oh, I'm desperate enough, if the truth were known."

"Yes," he said slowly. "Yes, I know you are."

They stared at one another for a moment. "How did it end?" said Dominique.

"As I suppose such things always do end: in quarrels and hatred, and then a little more love again, but sadder this time; then only contempt for myself, and apathy, and finally, no more money."

"So you came back together to Spain?"

"Yes, and we parted at Cartagena. She went to France a little later. My father saw to it that she would get no more work of any kind in Spain." He smiled at her. "My father saw to quite a lot of things as soon as he had me back in his sphere of influence."

"And you never hear from her?"

"Oh yes, every Christmas, without fail. Last year she was in Lille."

"That doesn't sound very prosperous."

"I don't suppose it was."

"You might at least send her some money, then."

He looked at her in surprise. "Out of what my father allows me?" he said. "You don't seem to realise how things are with me. I have the use of a car, and I own two horses. Apart from that I get seven thousand *pesetas* a month, and have about as much say in the family business as a junior clerk."

As he said this one of the women from the office came to the bar and, leaning over the counter, spoke to the barman. Still wiping sherry glasses the barman sidled now towards the clump of bulrushes.

"Telephone for you. Señor Llavaneras," he said, "in the office."

"Ah?" said Llavaneras. Then to Dominique: "This will be my father," he said. "Will you wait for me?"

"Oh yes, of course I'll wait: I'm very interested. How opportune."

"The prodigal son, you will see," he said, "returns to the paternal mansion at hours laid down by edict."

Dominique watched Llavaneras walk away. The back of his head is proud, she thought. He was not a big man: ten pounds lighter and two inches shorter, and he would have made an admirable jockey. Dominique sat alone upon her stool, and twisted the stub of her sherry glass upon the polished counter so that it made a squeaking sound. Perceiving that she was alone, another young man approached her. This man's name was Juan Gili.

"You rode very well to-night," he said. "Won't you have a drink?"

"I have a drink, thank you."

And she drove him away with her hard eyes and her talk about the weather. First, he took his feet off the black iron bar which ran

along and beneath the counter. Then he shifted a foot enclosed in suede, and glanced in desperation at his previous companions. Then he went away altogether; declaring, with obvious untruth, that he had an appointment for dinner.

The audience laughed. Dominique despatched her glance around the tables. There was silence.

Llavaneras returned.

"He tells me that it is time that I came home," he said.

"Poor little boy."

"But I'm not going home."

"Now you are a brave little boy."

He thrust his head behind the bulrushes. She went back a step or two until her left elbow hit the line of Bacardi bottles on a lower shelf. No one, now, could see a thing except one of his thin shoulders, one of her ears.

"Don't laugh at me," he said. "What would you do? Very likely you'd do just what I do—and I do what my father says. I have noticed in life that it is only people who are weak themselves who laugh at the weak."

"Go on," she said. "When you get angry like that, your moustache starts moving several ways at once."

"That's a stupid, rather insulting remark to make, isn't it?" he said.

"I only made it," she said, "because it seems to me a stupid moustache."

He looked at her, and then—unable to prevent himself—he touched his moustache, gently, with an index finger. "I told my father that I wouldn't be coming home until much later," he said. He hesitated. When he had finished tipping the words sideways from his mouth, he had said: "Will you dine with me to-night?"

"So you're the bold boy now?" said Dominique. She looked at him reflectively. Then: "Yes," she said. "I'll dine with you, but I'll have to make a telephone call myself first."

"To your husband?"

"I suppose so."

"What is he like?"

"How should I know? You've just been saying that nobody knows what anybody else is like."

"Can I have your overcoat, too?" said Barbara.

"I suppose so," said Thornton. He went into the hall, and returned with his coat. Barbara was constructing what she claimed to be a wigwam. She had taken four of the dining-room chairs, and laid them in the form of a quadrilateral upon the floor. Across the cage thus formed she had already hung two blankets and several of Pepita's aprons. Geneviève, who quite clearly had no doubt at all that this house was being built for her, watched the proceedings with interest.

"Where did you learn this game?" asked Thornton.

"I saw some boys playing it," said Barbara.

"Would you have liked to have a brother?" he said.

"No, I wouldn't. It's much nicer with Geneviève."

The telephone began to ring in a little room far down the flat which nobody used, but which was known as the 'bureau' because it contained a writing-desk. He lifted the receiver.

"I shan't be back until late," said Dominique. "I'm going over to the military school with some people, to look at the horses."

"All right. What about it?"

"I thought I'd better let you know."

"Well, now you have. What kind of horses are they?"

"I shall be in by about twelve," she said.

"Thank you for letting me know. In that case I shall probably be out."

He returned to the dining-room. Barbara and Geneviève were now sitting inside the wigwam. Both were wearing hats belonging to Dominique. Geneviève, with a solemn expression, was endeavouring to strike matches. Barbara, with the aid of various pots and pans, was pretending to cook a meal for her sister.

"There'll be trouble about those hats," said Thornton.

"But they're old," protested Barbara. "Maman never wears them now."

"People get attached to old hats," he said. "They like to see them sitting comfortably upon a shelf."

"Why don't you come in here with us?" suggested Barbara. "Not all of you, but just the head."

"All right." He went down on his hands and knees. It was warm and dark inside the wigwam, and full of baby smells of soap and talcum powder.

"Now you're a sheriff," explained Barbara. "Our husbands

are out hunting. You've come to make us pay our taxes."

"What a lot of things you know," said Thornton.

"It's for our bow-and-arrow licences," said Barbara. She bent, and kissed her sister. "Pay your tax, Genny," she said. "Be a good girl." But Geneviève considered that she had been given the five coins which she clutched in her small hand for quite another purpose: namely their insertion between her father's shirt collar and his neck.

"Genny," protested Barbara.

"Let her be," said Thornton. "She's paying me in her own fashion."

"Then I will, too," said Barbara. She pulled his shirt open, pushed her own coins inside, then began to tickle him. Thornton felt the cold coins jingling on his stomach.

Behind him, footsteps approached. Hurriedly, Thornton withdrew his head, confronted Pepita. "*Dios mio*," she said, "Señor Desmond, you should not let them play in this way." Then, with shrill cries of shame, she retrieved various articles stolen from her bedroom: "My shawl . . . my Sunday apron . . . oh no, this is too much: a stocking. Barbara," she ordered, "put the chairs back where you found them, then both come and have your dinner," Barbara did not understand the words, but the tone of voice was quite sufficient.

When the children had gone, Thornton lay down on the sofa, and read listlessly through the six pages of an English daily newspaper. A football player had been transferred from one club to another at a fee exceeding twenty thousand pounds; a woman was being tried for the murder, by poison, of her husband; a financier had obtained, by the clandestine and extensive purchase of its shares, the control of a large company; a reporter had discovered, in one of the Eastern counties, a labourer who had never been inside a train, and this unfortunate man had been brought to London and shown St. Paul's and Buckingham Palace.

Thornton examined the photographs of these people, each of whom, presumably, must now be enjoying, if not his finest, at least his most thrilling hour. He contrasted their activities, and those of the newspapermen who reported them, with the events of his own life, which had now become completely static.

"I have lived too much, too soon, and too diffusely," he

thought. "At thirty-six I am worse than dead: I am indifferent. But Dominique, at twenty-two, has scarcely lived at all—or at least that is what she believes—and I am the clamp upon the valve, beneath which the steam is swirling, hissing, waiting to escape. There can be no other than a bitter end to everything. Not now."

Thornton threw the newspaper aside. The sheets separated, skidded on the floor. He lay back on the sofa, considering his second marriage in its chronological entirety from the time of its celebration four years before, and from the date of its decline two years before, to the present day. The first symptoms of disquiet, he remembered, had been shown in Bédoule, before the move to Spain.

"But what use is it to me that you have been in twenty countries and seen too many things?" Dominique had said. "What use is it to me that you showed energy, ambition, and talent at eighteen when you show nothing but inertia and disgust for life now? Can't you see that you stand there like a signpost, saying: '*This is the wrong road. It leads towards a bog . . .*'"

He had come to Spain, in the first instance, alone. This was to be their new country, their new hope, and both of them had hoped for that. She had followed, her condition recently adulterous. He had obtained knowledge of this lapse, and proceeding methodically, with the essential aid of Barry, he had suppressed, and with the joint wounds of rocks and a pistol butt, snuffed out from life the man whom he had believed her partner.

From this act of violence, of which she became aware, their marriage had never recovered, although it had seemed in the first, Spanish months as if the knowledge of the secret shared had strengthened old bonds and created new ones. But that had been a mere illusion: no sense of guilt oppressed him, nor even fear—for discovery was improbable. Upon her side the initial horror had given way to an indefinable feeling of admiration which, had he cared to nurture it, he might have developed into a fragmentary state of mind, the conjugal assertion of a definite fact, of an opinion firmly held.

But with that belief, like the rogue's yarn in rope with thin strands between the thicker strands, a sharp contempt was mingled. After all, he had killed the wrong man, and with such small risk to himself that how could she feel, once the first shock was past,

other than disdain and pity for him? During the nine months spent at Valencia their relations had been cordial and untroubled, yet throughout that period he had been obliged to go each day of the working week to the British Consulate, to serve with and under colleagues who had known the murdered man intimately; colleagues to whom this unsolved crime remained as a piquant and abiding subject of lunch hour and cocktail party conversation. And in Barcelona, a city which he visited each month on courier duties, in Barcelona lived Fife, the only person who had been present at his first meeting with the dead man—Fife who, although he could not possibly have known the reasons for it, had been witness to their immediate unusual mutual antagonism; Fife who knew that Thornton had not been in Madrid, as he declared, during three vital days; Fife who had shown by a dozen apparently casual remarks, made at various times, that he had guessed towards the truth.

In the last months of his Consular services, before the timely legacy had saved him from a humiliating dismissal for incompetence and inattention to his duties, Thornton had often feigned illness as a means of avoiding the odious necessity of appearing at the office. On those days he would lie in bed, an unread book upon the ash-stained counterpane, staring at the creeping shafts of sun upon the ceiling, lifting his head from the crumpled pillow only when he heard his wife's step in the corridor outside.

"Do you really intend to lie in bed all day?"

"Yes."

Yes—because, forgetting that he himself had created the image which obsessed him, he attributed his state of mind to some obscure and endemic anguish, and casting about, as a man about to die of thirst might do, in desperation, for a water-point, he now attempted to discover one single particle of his own life and character which did not seem to be poisoned by sensuality, selfishness, pride, or the paralysis of every genuine emotion save that of fear.

On receipt of the solicitor's letter, with its welcome news, he had roused himself, and throughout the weeks involving the transfer of his family to Barcelona, their installation in a flat, and his acquisition of a business he had shown, or appeared to his wife to show, something of his former energy.

Yes, this, too, had been illusory, not destined to endure. The idea of opening a shop, which would sell, exclusively, clothes for servants was in itself excellent; nor was his choice of personnel at fault, for he could hardly have found two more loyal and enthusiastic collaborators than Luis and Maruja; but after the first few weeks, when the excitement of novelty had given place to the need for hard work, he had resumed his now habitual state of apathy, broken only when he was playing with his children, or engaged upon one of his occasional trips to the French frontier upon a very different kind of business.

If he had made, in these first months of what should and could have been a new and pleasant life, some overture of friendliness towards Dominique it is probable that she would have responded eagerly; but, enclosed within his private cage of despair, much as some animal butting endlessly against the bars although instinct informs it that no escape is possible, he thought of her only as an enemy, would not permit her to occupy herself with the shop, took her out only reluctantly and allowed—indeed, encouraged—her to live a life apart from his.

True, Dominique herself provided constant fuel with which to feed his bitterness. She both knew and disapproved of his transactions with Barry.

"Oh, must you be so bourgeois", he had said once, returning from the Pyrénées after an affair which had nearly gone awry, almost involved himself in a fusillade, and others in the loss of valuable mules.

"I'd rather be a bourgeois than a crook," she replied.

This passion on his part for excitement, artificially induced, appeared to Dominique as both ridiculous and vulgar. Reared in the deep Languedoc of France, at Pézénac, at a point equidistant between Béziers, Narbonne and the sea, the single daughter of a widowed father whose ancestors, descendants of the Albigenian heresy, had possessed sufficient force of character to wrest at the Revolution from weak nobles, about to fly to Switzerland, the titles of their estates, Dominique would normally have married the son of some man whose land lay adjacent to that of her father.

At the time of her first acquaintance with Thornton the latter had appeared to her, quite apart from the love which she had felt for him, to represent a wonderful opportunity of escape from

surroundings known too long. But with the passage of time the practical side of her nature had begun to reassert itself. Travel, the management of a household, the education of her child: these were not enough. In her blood swam that of women who had dealt annually with the harvesting and disposal of several thousand dozen litres of white wine, women who had brought barren hillsides beneath cultivation and bargained as equals in the Narbonne markets with some of the most powerful men in that part of France. Without work to occupy her too long leisure hours Dominique fretted: she was not made for any but the domesticity of evening, when the limbs are tired, the brain glad of relaxation.

All this he knew; indeed, could not avoid knowing, but he did nothing to help her, obsessed by the thought that if she had a life apart from his, then he must lose her altogether . . . yet well knowing also that, deprived of an outlet for her energy, she must eventually break free.

Thornton rose. He collected the fallen sheets of newspaper, folded them carefully. In the kitchen Pepita was busy with his dinner. "I'm going out," he said, then shut the door quickly so that he should not hear her protests. The children were already in bed. The light was out, but neither child was yet asleep. Often they would talk, or rather Barbara would talk and Geneviève croon in reply, for an hour or more. He kissed them.

In the street he turned eastwards, towards the centre of the town. He crossed the Diagonal, and on the far side, beside a garage, hesitated. Often, at night-time, he would set out in this manner, walking a mile or two in one direction and then deciding, as his mood of the moment suggested, how best to continue. He had various set itineraries, one of which took him forty minutes, another an hour and a half, and a third as much as three hours to cover. On certain nights he would walk aimlessly, and on still others he would select some person from the passing crowds whom he would follow, stopping when they stopped, visiting the same bars, abandoning the pursuit only when the quarry, perhaps several hours later reached his home (a fact of which proof was required by the insertion of a latchkey in a door) or, alternatively, frustrated further pursuit by entering a cinema, or some similar place of entertainment.

To-night Thornton did none of these things. He was hungry,

and thought with regret of the excellent supper which Pepita had offered him; thought even, with a twinge of self-accusation, of the trouble which she had certainly taken to prepare the meal. Having hitherto served in Spanish households where it is not the custom to offer meat or fish to servants except on days which are important feasts of the Church or public holidays, Pepita, he knew, would not have touched the cutlets herself but would have placed them in the oven, hoping that he would change his mind and return. Having eaten the thick soup made from chick-peas which, in truth, she preferred to all other dishes, since it was the staple food in her native village, Pepita would now be sitting crouched over the radio, that source, to her, of endless amusement and pleasure.

Thornton sighed. In the course of his life he had met many people who seemed as happy as Pepita, but none quite so artlessly happy. When Pepita wept it was invariably over the misfortunes of others, never over her own. Occasionally Dominique, or Thornton himself would read to her, upon request, but always and for good reason reluctantly, the accounts of accidents, or crimes, in the daily paper. Pepita would listen, her eyes widening, and then, suddenly, the tears would come . . . bitter tears over the death of a baby or the broken leg of an old man struck down by a tram. One afternoon, when she had been out walking with Geneviève, Pepita had seen a workman killed by a car in the Via Augusta. Every day, for ten days after that, Pepita had requested permission to go to the nearest church for half an hour in order to pray for the workman's soul.

Like so many of her class, Pepita did not believe in the Church as represented, on earth, by priests and by nuns, but in God she did believe, fervently, implicitly, knowing well that if He did not grant her simple requests immediately, then this was because He had many other and more serious matters with which to occupy His mind. Her time would come.

The sullen periods of silence, the violent quarrels, the days of doubt, reconciliation and love which made up the communal life of her employers were a mystery which Pepita made no attempt to solve, although it caused her sadness—above all, perhaps, for the sake of Geneviève—to witness the constant and increasing disharmony within the household. Yet she did not attempt to explain what, to her, was inexplicable, except in so far that both

these persons, to each of whom she was deeply attached, were foreigners, and therefore, perhaps, prone to such conduct, habitual no doubt in the lands from which they came.

Growing hunger quickened Thornton's steps. He was now in a business quarter of the town, and could not expect to find anything more substantial to eat than a sandwich hereabouts. He considered for a moment taking a taxi to Carballeira's, on the port, where he could always be sure of a game of poker after dinner with the *gallego* sergeants from the barracks, who remained there, nightly, until their curfew hour, but he discovered that he had not enough money with him to stand heavy losses. Then he remembered that there was, in fact, a small restaurant with an intriguing frontage not far away, which he had long intended to visit. He went there. The place had closed the previous day, for redecorations. Outside, he paused again, then turned to his right for no better reason than that he had seen the risen moon in that direction and preferred to walk with its light upon his face than towards the hubbub of the lower town. A block of houses hid the moon at first, but presently he reached a parapet above the sunken railway line which cuts its way through Barcelona. The moon, two nights distant from the menstrual plenitude, shone on the double tracks beneath him. He walked towards it. He was still thinking about Pepita.

When Pepita had been fifteen, the young man who was now officially her *novio*, and who had lived all his life but a few hundred yards distant from her home, had stood by the village well one day when she was drawing water. The young man had not spoken. He had looked at her. This scene had been repeated, almost daily, for about eighteen months.

At the close of this period the future *novio* approached one of Pepita's numerous brothers, with whom he had been on friendly terms for many years, and requested that he might have the honour of being invited to the brother's home one evening. The brother discussed the matter with his father and other brothers, and in due course, about two months later, an invitation was issued. Henceforward the *novio* visited Pepita's home once each week, and after a suitable lapse of time—in this case, about six months was considered sufficient—was bold enough to call twice each week. On no occasion, however, did he speak to Pepita, although he sometimes brought with him his guitar and

was permitted to sing love songs addressed to no one in particular.

These essential Andalusian preliminaries accomplished, there came the day when the *novio*, hat in hand, requested permission of Pepita's father to accompany his daughter to Mass. He had still not spoken to Pepita—or, at least, not since she had attained the age of puberty, although when they had been small they had played in the streets together. No doubt he spoke to her on the following Sunday.

Now, seven years later, when both the *novio* and Pepita were aged twenty-three, and by joint parental permission had been permitted to come and work in Barcelona—he in a factory, herself in service—no essential of these arrangements had been modified. The pair still went to Mass together on Sundays, the only day on which they ever met. They kissed when he called to fetch her, and again at nine o'clock in the evening, after which hour it was incorrect for Pepita to be abroad in the streets. When they had put aside enough money they would return to their village and marry.

Dominique, who possessed the girl's confidence in these matters, had informed Thornton that, although Pepita had once loved her *novio*, she now rather disliked him. Asked why, in that case, she did not break off the engagement, she had appeared first shocked, then uncomprehending. She did not now love her *novio* as formerly, she answered, but maybe she would love him again later, when there were children, or perhaps even sooner, when they returned to the peaceful surroundings of their own *pueblo*, or—perhaps again—much later still, when they had grown old. In any case the question was immaterial, since the *novio* had chosen her, struggled and shown patience in order to obtain her. Withdrawal upon her part now could mean nothing but dishonour and shame, although he, of course, having made these sacrifices, was free to withdraw at any time up to the actual publication of the banns.

It was while considering these matters affecting Pepita that Thornton covered nearly a mile of pavement along the sunken railway line. In the chaos of his conduct, and the perversion or extinction of so many of his natural sentiments, he could not but derive comfort from the spectacle of a society in which fidelity to a course of conduct, once chosen, was axiomatic and certain principles undiscussed because immutable. The attitude of Pepita towards her life and marriage was peculiar neither to herself nor

to the particular region of Spain in which she had been born, but could be observed throughout the whole country, glozed and softened, it was true, in other classes, other places, but omnipresent.

Chance is but the casual labourer of memory. Thornton had been unable to visit the first restaurant because he had insufficient money with which to gamble after dinner. He had then proceeded to a second restaurant only to find it closed. Now, as he leant against the parapet, tired, having quite forgotten dinner and content to watch a goods train clank past beneath him, a neon-light blinked into action beyond the railway track, and he recognised his whereabouts. Less than a hundred yards away lay the Plaza Calvo Sotelo; closer still, a small restaurant, the *Glorieta*, which he had often visited with Dominique when they had first come to Barcelona.

He crossed the railway bridge, studied the menu. Yes, he thought: a *chateaubriand*, then some cheese; perhaps a little, Pommard. The plate glass was steamy. He pushed the door open, entered the vestibule. The hour was late, the place not crowded, with only one, two . . . he counted . . . four couples, and a party of jocund business-men in an alcove near the kitchens.

Then he looked again, sharply: the feminine half of the third couple was Dominique; the man he did not know.

Thornton's first impulse was to retreat. Indeed, he took a step backwards with this intention, but then, seeing the head-waiter advance, he thought better of his decision. Advancing himself, he selected a table directly opposite the pair.

Dominique did not see her husband sit down, nor notice him at all until he began to order, when, at the sound of his voice, she raised her head. Their eyes met. Neither spoke. Thornton did not look at her again, nor she at him . . . except once, at his bent head, just as she was leaving, ten minutes later. He felt this look but would not raise his eyes.

When he had finished his meal Thornton called for cigars. He sat for more than one hour at his table, long after all the other clients had left; long, even, after the jolly business-men.

When at last he rose, his attention was attracted by some torn pieces of paper beside the empty wine carafe on her table. He picked up one of these fragments, turned it over, recognised his own chin and part of his nose.

He had not been aware, previously, that she carried photographs of him about with her.

Five

A THOUSAND FEET BELOW THE TWO RIDERS THE CITY SPREAD, her houses white and brown, her church spires indicating heaven, her streets a fretwork pattern filled with leaves, and her backcloth a mazy, misty blue, the sea.

Up here upon the bridle paths, in the sweet, myrtle-scented air of morning, the umbrella pines sang with the bracing message of the Pyrénées, haughty brothers to this ring of hills set like a caravan of dromedaries above the urban scene.

"Another hundred metres and the path will begin to mount again," said Paco Llavaneras. "Are you quite sure that you can manage?"

"Oh yes," said Dominique.

"In that case I'll go ahead of you. Hold your bridle loose. Your horse will follow mine. They are old friends from their days in the cavalry together."

They rode on for some moments in silence. Presently, as he had warned her, the path forked left, and upwards, into cork woods.

"Why do they say that horses are stupid?" she asked.

"Who says that?"

"Well . . . my father, for one; but then his opinions are always original."

"I am stupid, too," he replied and, turning, smiled at her. "Perhaps that's why I understand horses."

Often, late at night, when all his household slept, Paco would leave his bed and, dressing, drive to the silent riding school where surly grooms employed as night watchmen would, after argument, permit him access to the stalls in which his horses were quartered. Then, with carrot, sugar, soft words of love and the caress of finger tips, he would coax the animals until a first shrill whinny, an upward toss of mane, or the stamp of foot on straw assured him of their continued faith and understanding.

"What is it that they give you?" she had once asked him.

"I can't explain, but when I'm in the saddle it is as if their blood coursed with mine, as if I shared their strength and single-mindedness. Not so much with *Portia* perhaps, because she likes to fight me, but with *Trébol*, always."

Portia was his mare, whom he was riding now, and Dominique was riding *Trébol*.

"Paco," she said.

"Yes?"

"Why do you always say you're stupid?"

"One must look facts in the face. The only talent I possess happens to be the one I'm sitting on at this moment. With my feet on the ground I'm like a sailor ashore, and I haven't even the advantage of a love in every port."

Dominique laughed. His gaiety amused her. He was always like this. He seemed to go through life saying: "*Well, nobody actively dislikes me, and that is surely a considerable advantage. Let us hope that I will get through the next twenty-four hours without more than two or three lectures from my father. Then it will be Sunday and I needn't see him at all!*"

"Tell me," she said, "were they never married?"

"Who?"

"*Trébol* and *Portia*."

"Yes. I believe the ceremony was attempted once during their days of military service, but it didn't work. That often happens, particularly when the two horses know each other well."

"And they remain good friends?"

"Yes, why ever not? When I bought them she had a two-month foal. To see the three together you'd have thought old *Trébol* was a godfather."

The horses continued to mount, picking their way, sure-footed and with dainty steps. The path, although narrow, presented no great difficulty, though once or twice Dominique was obliged to duck in order to avoid an overhanging branch.

"Two minutes more, and we'll be in the avenue by the Observatory," said Paco. "Then we can gallop."

Dominique breathed deeply, retaining the air in her lungs for several seconds. She had been out before, but never so high up as this, and always with one of the riding masters, and as a member of a party. The exercise, the sharp tang of cold air upon her cheeks, the moist smell of the woods: these things delighted her. She

could feel the health of her body, see it in the arm which she stretched forward to pluck a dangling leaf. "I have good arms," she thought. "They were made for this, to hold a bridle, not to lie upon the borders of a sofa or a bed. *This*, every day and more and more, is what I should be doing. Soon I will be good enough to enter competitions. Then we shall see. I shall take the cups home and make a place for them among Desmond's bric-à-brac upon the mantelpiece." At the thought of her husband she smiled, a smile of one part tenderness, two parts scorn and pity. Where was he now? In the back room of his shop no doubt, with a newspaper on his knees, and the first drinks of the day inside him.

The man ahead of her was silent, and his silence pleased her. Silence, movement, simple thought of simple things: what better method could there be to contain the soul within the happy frontiers of a gentle and continuous reassurance, where dreams were happy, never vain, and meditation useful, never melancholy?

They had now reached the summit of the little path, and debouched upon the wide avenue, several hundred yards in length, which ran towards the Observatory, beneath the peak and pleasure gardens known as Tibidabo.

"Shall we stop and have a cigarette?" suggested Paco.

"Yes," she said, "I'd like one." They smoked. The two horses, standing close together, nuzzled one another, each striving to maintain its head uppermost.

"Should you be up here in the middle of the morning?" said Dominique. "Whatever will your father say?"

Paco chuckled. "He's several miles away, down there," he said, and he pointed to the city.

"Yes, but when you go back?"

He made a comic grimace, and drew his finger across his throat: "Ah, that's another matter."

His disregard for the consequences of his escapade delighted her because she very well knew that he was perfectly capable of standing up to his father, when he chose to do so, and that if tonight, for example, he worked late, this would be of his own volition, and not by parental order.

He was looking at her. "Have you thought about what I was saying last night at dinner?" he asked.

"Yes, I thought all night about it."

"All night?" he said gently, leaning forward.

"I spent the night alone," she said, deliberately choosing to misconstrue his question.

He was silent, running his fingers through the mane of his horse. "Then you do agree," he said at last, "that the best thing for you is to take a job?"

"I've thought so for months, but the trouble is that I don't know which job to take. She sighed. "I'm always worse than useless until I get started. But when I do begin, there's never any stopping me . . ."

"Do as I suggested," he said. "I have a friend in the *Haute Couture*. With your figure, and carriage, you could have a job as a mannequin to-morrow if you wanted one. It's hard going, and of course they don't pay Paris salaries in Spain, but it seems to me the kind of work which would interest you."

Dominique listened to him. A wave of warmth and happiness ran upwards through her body. "Do you really think that I'd be any good?" she said.

"I know very well that you'd be good."

They were silent. Beneath them the horses' feet were champing, churning up wet brown particles of path. The animals were anxious to put the piston in their muscles, to be off.

He waited until she had lit her second cigarette. Then: "And him?" he said.

"Who?" she said.

"You know very well whom I mean."

"Oh, him," she said. "Even when I said good-morning, in the bathroom, where we always talk, when we're dressing or undressing, he said nothing. We have another bathroom, not a real one, just a douche. When I came in he shut off the hot water tap and went off there to shave."

"Do you think he was in the restaurant last night deliberately?" said Paco.

Dominique hesitated. "No, I don't think so," she said. She thought about the matter for a moment: "No, I'm certain not," she said at last. "I took you to that place," she said. "I told you it was one of our restaurants—his and mine. I expect he just turned up there because he was in that part of the town. He's very nice, really . . . yes, about some things he is nice. He must have come in, seen us, run to the door, and then thought that Thorntons

never run away. That's one of his favourite themes, incidentally, when he's drunk. I often wish he *had* run away. We wouldn't have all this. Life would be so simple. But, no doubt, in that damned war he just ran as far as a wall, or the barbed wire, or some similar obstruction, and then his sergeant called him back, reminding him that it was the duty of a gentleman to lead . . ."

"And to destroy his wife as well?" said Paco.

"Oh, you want to know, do you . . . you want to know?"

"Yes, I think I'd better know," he said.

"He doesn't care . . . he doesn't care," she said. "Except what's taking place inside his head, nothing matters to him. There's something I can't talk to you about, something that he did once. It obsesses him. But even if there hadn't been *that*, he'd have found some other means to shut the world away."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Perhaps it's just as well you don't," she said sardonically. "His attitude is perfectly simple really . . . from his point of view. If he estranges all his friends, for example, that's fine—because it makes him more alone, and to be alone, struggling with what's inside him, is what he wants."

"But hasn't he got any friends at all?"

"Oh yes, he has his drinking partners, like Freddy Cherr, and one or two low-life individuals whom he describes as 'characters'. There's a taxi-driver, for instance, who's perhaps his greatest chum. Then, in the great world of intelligence, there's José Beltran, who hates and despises everybody, which, of course, suits Desmond perfectly."

"He must be ill."

"Not ill enough. That's half the trouble. And you mustn't think he minds if people think him a ridiculous figure. Oh no. He considers that very much a compliment, rather like some anarchist, grinning in the dock when the judge describes him as a dangerous character. Unfortunately, what Desmond doesn't realise is that there are big anarchists and little ones. The big ones blow up banks but the little ones just put their bombs in tramcars. That's what Desmond is down to now—tramcars—and he likes it. The more squalid and petty the upheaval, the *better* he likes it because life to him, as people try to live it, decently, and with some respect for their neighbours, seems quite absurd . . . not worth a big bomb, even if he knew how to make one."

"I don't know whether you should be telling me all this," he said uncomfortably.

"Why not? You think I'm being disloyal? You wanted very much to become my . . ." she paused, and looked at him: then "accomplice, didn't you?" she added.

"Doesn't he love you at all, then?" he said, slowly.

Dominique threw her cigarette away. "What right have you to know?" she said.

"None, of course."

"Then don't ask me stupid questions."

"I should say one thing is clear," said Paco, "and that's that you love *him*."

"I don't know what I feel. Perhaps I don't feel any more at all? If so, it's a disease I've caught from him." She shifted in the saddle, swinging her horse round to face the avenue. "Oh, let's gallop," she said, "I'm sick of sitting still."

"Wait a moment," said Paco. "Let me go ahead. There's a turn at the end and sometimes people coming in and out of the Observatory. You have to be careful."

"No, no," she said, laughing. "I'm leading this time. You can follow." Without hesitating further, she jabbed with her spurs at the horse's flanks. The animal, surprised, half reared, then bounded forward, and presently was galloping.

"You're mad . . . you're mad," Paco shouted after her. It is unlikely that she heard. He saw her turn her head and laugh at him. Spurring his own horse he set off in pursuit though precious seconds had been wasted: Dominique was thirty yards away by this time. He used the whip upon his horse, but knew that not he but disaster would overtake her.

Beyond the Observatory lay a track junction. Here four paths met in grassy marriage. The main avenue continued, swinging sharply to the right and, as sharply again, downhill. Beyond the brow and down beyond the slope he saw her go; his heart racing only ten beats behind the beat of his horse's hooves.

Sometimes decisions of the utmost importance are never taken, but form of themselves. The act of will does not step forward, as some soldier, from the ranks of hesitation. A suite of actions, unimportant in themselves, simple, natural, occurs. Only when these are examined later, in their historical perspective, can it be seen that all had been decided long before.

At first, reining in his horse, he saw nothing, save the deserted avenue, the gently swaying trees. Then in a patch of grass, cropping peacefully, he noticed *Trébol*, with his bridle dangling and his saddle set askew. Dismounting, he ran down. Dominique lay on her face beside a tree, her outstretched hands in gorse. He knelt beside her, turned her over. There was blood upon her forehead:

"You fool . . . you fool, you've killed yourself," he shouted, and yet even as he said this, knew it was not so.

Gently, he raised her so that her head feclined against his shoulder. With a handkerchief he wiped the blood away. The cut was wide but superficial: evidently she had been thrown not against the tree itself but across an old tree stump beside it. Her breeches, too, were torn and muddy at the knees, and here, too, he found blood.

"*Carino . . . carino*," he said. No doubt it was bad for her, but he could not bear to leave her and kept dabbing at her face although the cut was quite clean now and the blood had ceased to flow. Gently he rocked her in his arms, and stared at her closed eyes. "Perhaps it is concussion," he thought, "perhaps something worse? I should run to the Observatory for help, but supposing she regained consciousness and found herself alone?"

He looked at the horse. "You bastard," he said to it. "You obstinate bastard, I'll get even with you for this."

All was quiet in the woods, save for the distant sound of pigeons. He kissed the crinkled flesh above the girl's cut forehead. He kissed her eyes, her hand, which stirred, and then her mouth. A small lizard, who had perhaps seen the accident, and fled as from the sound of thunder, now emerged from a hole in the tree, slid, in darting movements, along the corrugations of the bark, then paused, lifted a pulsing throat towards the sun, his small body immobilised in solar ecstasy.

Llavaneras watched the lizard and it seemed to him that the animal was, in its turn, watching them, turning its head this way and that in order to obtain a better view.

He kissed Dominique again. "It is not right," he thought. "I should not be doing this." Yet he could not restrain himself: her lips yielded so easily, were already parted for the kiss.

"I love you," he whispered. "I love you. All these many months I've loved you . . . ever since the summer."

The day, the hour, the colour of the sky, the murmur of the trees and that, softer still, of his own voice: these things combined to give him courage. There was as much virtue in his occasional silences as in what he said, and he spoke, as if to himself, with a marvellous facility, as he could not have spoken had she been listening to him. He held her body in his arms and his own hard warmth and that, softer, of the sun were his ministers of Love.

At last, while his lips still hovered above her own, she stirred, opened her eyes, looked at him as if puzzled for a moment, and then, again, straight in the eyes: and then with understanding. Breathless with apprehension he withdrew, out of focus, out of crime.

He need not have feared.

"Well . . . yes," she said. "Well . . . yes."

Six

THORNTON EXAMINED THE NOTEPAPER, which was thick, and of good quality; the printed letter-heading in the left hand corner which advertised the address and telephone number of the Provincial Prison at Seville, the text itself, together with the quality of the typing, which he observed to have been performed upon a Spanish machine, if one were to judge by the recurring phenomenon of accents above vowels.

The letter read, and Thornton could almost see the process of its passing, by successive dictation; first by Barry in Spanish to some turnkey who required to know its contents, then from this turnkey to a more literate friend—finally, the turnkey having procured from the Prison Governor's office the official paper which Barry, always much concerned with protocol when in adversity, would demand, into the final, somewhat stilted English:

Dear friend,

I am happy to say that I have been authorised to receive your visit here. The journey is a long one, but I know you will come. We have many things to discuss. Visiting hours, unlike those of hospitals, are in the mornings, I am informed. Sometime

next week might be best, though the earlier in the week the better.
Your affectionate friend

Barry Keating

P.S. I am only allowed to see relatives, so am afraid I have had to transform you into my cousin.

"Who brought this here?" said Thornton to Luis. The pair were standing in the office at the back of the shop.

"A rather well-dressed negro gentleman," said Luis.

"I wonder why he didn't come to my flat."

"Perhaps he thought your porter might impose a colour bar," said Luis. "Black men are sensitive about these little things." He licked his lips slowly. "Some of us might do well to imitate the sensitivity of our darker brothers," he added. Then: "He is coming back for your reply at twelve."

"Well, I shall be fifty miles away by then, but you can tell him it's all right. I'll go down to Seville on Monday."

"Are you quite sure that you'll be back here by Monday?"

"Yes, why not? It gives me three clear days. I've never taken longer before."

"Allow me to remark," said Luis, "that those other times you went alone. When one makes these trips in company, many complications can occur."

Thornton looked at him. "Are you suggesting," he said, "that it's improper to take Maruja with me?"

"It might be better if you *did* think it improper," said Luis. "Maruja is twenty, and a girl of strong feelings. She is not a piece of furniture."

"You make me tired," said Thornton. "Maruja is coming because I'm incapable of talking for more than two hours at a time in Catalan. She can also look after my daughter. That is all."

"Yes, as you say, that is all, and it is not enough," said Luis.

"Well, I haven't time to discuss the matter now. We must go. Will you come and see us off?"

"I'd best not leave the shop," said Luis.

"What an old crab you are!" said Thornton, and held out his hand.

"That is why you employ me," said Luis, and shook the hand.

The hired car was a small 4 h.p. Renault with Valencia number plates. Thornton drove. Maruja sat beside him, Barbara was in the back with the luggage. They were sprung out of Barcelona, and travelling northward on the road to France.

"But you drive quite well," said Maruja, who had not thought it would be so. "Why don't you buy a car?"

"No," said Thornton. "I can drive well once in a way, but not every day. I had a car once when I was young, and there was constant trouble." He looked at the image of his daughter in the driving mirror. "Are you all right?" he said.

"Yes, Papa."

"It does her good to get out a bit," observed Maruja.

"Yes, that's why I brought her. A flat is no place for a child, and until she speaks Spanish better I can't let her run around alone."

"What does she do on her half-holidays?"

"Ask her," said Thornton.

Maruja asked her in French.

"I like to go roller-skating best," said Barbara.

"And what about the Zoo . . . and the Tibidabo?"

"I haven't been to those places."

"Poor child, but she's not been anywhere," exclaimed Maruja, then checked herself: to continue upon this theme would be to imply criticism either of her employer or, worse still, of his wife, whom she hated with a sullen violence. So: "How is she getting on at school?" she said.

"At the *lycée*? Well, she was twenty-first out of twenty-six last month, which, I suppose, is not bad since she was working in French for the first time for two years. You actually got a good mark for needlework, too, didn't you?" He grinned at his daughter.

"Two good marks," said Barbara.

Maruja sighed. "It must be so difficult to bring up children in a foreign land," she said.

"I find it difficult to bring them up anywhere," said Thornton. "When I was a boy I was absolutely convinced that I'd be a wonderful father. I thought I knew just where my own parents had gone wrong. Now I know better."

"The secret is patience," said Maruja. She was happy. She had been thrilled with a delicious alarm when he had suggested that she should accompany him upon this trip. Now her heart was warm

with this moment of intimacy, in which he was prepared to discuss his daughter with her. Also, she was almost sure that he had not taken a drink all day.

"There are some American nuns in Sarria," she said. "You could have sent her there."

"Would you like some American nuns?" said Thornton to his daughter.

"I don't want any nuns at all," she answered.

He chuckled, and, swerving to pass a lorry, put his foot hard on the accelerator. Poplars whistled by. "I like it when she answers back," he said. "I like it when she gives me her opinion about things. The other day, for instance, she said that she thought people were more polite in shops here than in London, but much ruder in the Métro. One day, she even brought me my breakfast in bed. I am unaccustomed to the idea of children being useful to their parents."

"But didn't you *want* to have the children?" said Maruja. "This one, and the baby?"

"I don't think so. They both came by accident. I'm too selfish to be a natural parent."

"You're not selfish at all," protested Maruja. "You're good, and you pretend to be bad."

"Have it your own way," he said. "Have it your own way," and lit a cigarette.

Maruja examined father and daughter cautiously: there was no great resemblance between them, she decided, except in the hair, the colouring and a certain obstinate set of the mouth. She speculated concerning the character of Barbara's dead mother: there had once been a photograph of this tall, rather impressive-looking woman on Thornton's desk in the office. Then, one day, Maruja had noticed that the picture was gone and, searching, had discovered it buried among papers in a little-used drawer. Several months later the picture was missing from the drawer also. Had he destroyed it? He never spoke of his first wife, except by inference, and when obliged to do so.

It was true, of course, that he did not speak often of his present wife, either.

Barbara had been exploring the pile of luggage beside her, the grips, the overcoats and such of the suitcases as would open. Now she held up something black and gleaming.

"Papa," she said. "Is this a real one . . . does it work?"

"Yes," he replied. "If you press the trigger, but don't do it here because we're supposed to be a happy little family on holiday."

* * * *

The village of Llivia, with rather less than a thousand inhabitants, lies four kilometres north of the frontier in an 'enclave left to Spain by the Treaty of the Pyrénées in 1659; the text of that document specifying that only the *villages* of the province of Cerdagne should be ceded to France, whereas Llivia, at that time, held the rank of town. This territorial anomaly, of a segment of Spanish territory entirely surrounded by France, exists to this day.

Llivia, which takes its name from the wife of Augustus Cæsar, was once a powerful fortress. Mere vestiges of the castle have survived the demolition work of Gascon engineers. The village itself is squalid, the surrounding country poor and barren, the inhabitants brutish and, although cunning, much persecuted by the equally cunning police and frontier guards of the two nations to whom, they are obliged to own local, if not political allegiance.

From Llivia a road, considered to be neutral territory, leads southward to the French border at Bourg-Madame. A bridge at this point denotes the general frontier. Beyond the bridge and the Customs Houses, the road mounts to Puigcerda, an animated and pleasant little town, situated upon a plateau, and enjoying a certain importance as a holiday resort in summer time.

In the last days of the Spanish Civil War, in April 1939, when the Nationalist troops were no more than thirty miles distant, at Vich, many thousands of refugees crossed the frontier at this point. Most of these were humble folk, victims of the panic which accompanies all such national catastrophes; peasants and small business people who had left their homes in fear of rape and pillage by the dreaded Moors. Others, however, were neither so humble nor so unjustified in their belief that a frightful fate must overtake them should they remain in Spanish territory. Anarchists highly placed in the Barcelona hierarchy, trade union officials, Army officers of the Republican General Staff, the personnel of Ministries: these, and others, sped northward, motor-borne, in cars heavily laden with personal effects, with archives, and with booty.

During the first days of the exodus French authorities were inclined to be helpful and, indeed, displayed considerable humanity in their dealings with the refugees. Presently, however, the growing number of these latter, their bitter recriminations amongst each other and against their hosts, the dirt and the diseases which they spread through no fault of their own, led to a sharp revulsion of feeling. Senegalese troops were drafted to the frontier with orders to herd the refugees into reception areas. Here hastily erected barracks and kilometres of barbed wire offered them the two more constant realities of concentration camps. Until now, also, the fugitives had been allowed to retain their property, but when the black soldiers arrived all manner of excesses began to be committed. Those who passed the frontier were stripped of all save their immediate possessions; those who still awaited permission to enter France grew fearful of the reception attending them, and, as a result, not a few elected—in the case of simple citizens, for the most part wisely—to return to their homes.

The crimes of which the victorious faction accused their unfortunate opponents were, however, so various and the decreed punishments so severe that all who had been in any way politically connected with the fallen régime must necessarily fear for their lives.

Among such persons, and with better reason to feel insecure than most, was a police commissar of the Catalan Generalidad named Damien Heras. On February 27th, 1939, this man set out from Gerona for Pujcerda in a Citroën touring car, in the boot and beneath the seats of which were concealed nearly 600 kilograms of platinum, composed of eighteen bars of equal weight and size: the property of the Bank of Spain. A head cashier of this bank, which is the official tenant of the Spanish Treasury, sat in the front seat beside Heras, who drove. In the back sat two armed militiamen, holding the rank of sergeant-major. The instructions issued to this party, of which Heras was in command, were to deliver the platinum by all means and with all possible despatch to the treasury of the Republican Government in exile.

Arriving in the vicinity of the frontier, Heras, an able and resolute man, made a rapid appreciation of the situation and decided that, in the confusion then prevailing, it would be

impossible to effect his mission. He therefore determined to conceal the treasure, for the time being at all events, in certain mountains to the east of Puigcerda. These mountains form a loop in the frontier, a finger of Spanish territory with its extremity no more than two kilometres distant from the enclave of Llívia. By reason of their altitude they were, unlike the valleys and the lower slopes, comparatively free of refugee encampments. Some degree of secrecy concerning the operation could therefore be assured.

The cashier, who had also received his own separate instructions, did not concur with the proposed arrangements. Heras made no definite reply to his companions' arguments at the time, but, playing upon the man's very natural inquietude in the face of so much confusion and uncertainty, and being, in addition, the only member of the party who could drive the car, he had no difficulty in persuading the cashier to resume his seat. The party set off once again, this time by way of vile and bumpy mountain roads, to a place suitable for the cashier's execution. Here the two militiamen, who entirely concurred with the view of their leader, descended and, persuading their companion to descend also upon some such pretext as a natural need, first shot him in the back, then buried his body, digging the grave with a spade which Heras had taken the precaution of placing in the boot, beneath some of the bars of platinum, at Gerona.

Heras later told Desmond Thornton, whose servant he became in the hard years which followed, that the constant jangling of the spade against the platinum—of base metal against precious—in the half-empty boot had exacerbated the nerves of the cashier throughout the whole journey.

When they had buried their victim, which of course it was most necessary that they should do, if only to ensure that his identity should not be discovered, the other men buried the treasure. This second task they undertook at an emplacement a few feet below a trigonometrical cairn on the summit of a minor mountain peak, unmarked in ordnance surveys but known locally as *Los tres vientos*. Heras, who alone among the survivors possessed the requisite knowledge, noted, and retained for his own use, a map reference of both mountain and cache. The three men then crossed the frontier, joined the floods of refugees, were lost and separated from each other among them, and did not meet again

until many months later, in the city of Toulouse, which had by that time become the headquarters of certain security services in a phantom Government.

The cashier was not missed, except perhaps by his sorrowing relatives in the Barcelona suburb of Sans, who remain unaware of his ultimate fate. No explanation was ever required from his companions, for the excellent reason that an authority capable of demanding such explanation no longer existed. It is probable, even, that the person who had ordered Heras to perform this particular mission was himself dead, or had, by reason of some similar malpractice upon his own part, good grounds for concealment.

Throughout the long years of the Second European War the fate of the three persons who had been privy to these events was diverse. Of the two militiamen, the first, who was named Marsal, died unspectacularly of pneumonia while employed as a farm-hand, in the village of Lésignan, between Toulouse and Narbonne. Although he must have been aware that Heras was living in the same department as himself, at no time did he attempt to get in touch with him.

The other man, however, whose name was Teixal, did not forget that he had once been engaged upon business of considerable importance, and upon his return to France in 1945, after two years in the German concentration camp of Flossenbergl, he called upon Heras, whose address he had obtained from a fellow national, a member of the *Espanolista* chess club, of Toulouse.

The discussion which ensued between the two men was first amicable, then more lively; finally most acrid, inasmuch as the first part of it took place within closed premises, the second in the street and in various cafés, and the third upon a lonely beach, a couple of kilometres northward from the town of La Nouvelle; a place to which Heras had suggested that they should walk.

Here Heras, who, as has been seen, was invariably ready with the implement necessary to his projects, produced a teak baton which had previously been dangling inside his trousers, and clubbed his companion upon the head many times, until he had killed him. No spade was necessary with which to bury the body on this occasion. The short, overhanging tufts of grass upon the five-foot cliffs of that tideless shore produce, when pulled, a more than adequate landslide, a sandy blanket durable until eternity.

The bones, no doubt, are still there to-day, as are those of the cashier sixty miles away.

Heras had not, or so he was later to maintain, thought much about the platinum throughout the years of war. He had been informed in due course, by the round-robin and roneograph methods which exiles favour, of the first militiaman's death, and of the transportation of the second, but, being himself a man whose extradition the Spanish Government had particularly requested of the occupying Germans, he was during this whole period in hiding in a distant part of France, living under a false name, and unable to move, without grave danger, more than a few kilometres from his place of refuge.

Cupidity was a vice quite foreign to this man's nature, yet his obstinacy and his intransigence when he had once come to some decision knew no bounds. Undoubtedly he had killed the cashier for what had appeared to him to be excellent and overriding reasons. The man was old, feeble, unable to face a march of twenty miles or more across rugged country. He had already raised objections to Damien's plans to bury the platinum, and might do so again, perhaps in the presence of strangers, thereby endangering the whole enterprise. Left alive, and a witness of what had taken place, he would probably talk: if captured, he would certainly do so.

It was better to shoot him.

Something of all this Damien explained to Thornton one day, when, on the latter's appointment as a Consular official in Narbonne, he entered, with his wife, the Englishman's employ. That is to say he spoke in roundabout, general terms of an old man whom he had been obliged to kill, and whose death he regretted. He did not, however, mention that the man had been a cashier, nor did he speak of platinum, and when Thornton, who had not yet himself killed a man in cold blood, expressed a certain surprise, Damien had replied, haughtily:

"Say what you please. I serve Spain . . . only Spain . . . democratic Spain."

To this statement Thornton had, at the time, found no convincing reply, nor was he to do so until the pair met again, four years later, in totally different circumstances.

From Narbonne, Thornton had been posted to Toulon, and from the last-named place to Valencia. He had seen Damien

Heras at irregular intervals throughout this period, for the Spaniard continued to live in La Nouvelle, a town to which Thornton travelled occasionally in order to visit the grave of his first wife, Gloria. The last of these occasions had been when Thornton was on his way through France to take up his appointment in Valencia.

Thornton had hardly been in Valencia a week when he found himself obliged, much against his will, to shelter Damien for several days, first in a hotel bedroom, and subsequently in a hideously furnished flat which he had rented in preparation for the arrival of Dominique and Geneviève. Moreover, Damien was wounded, having been shot through the buttocks in an attack upon a courier van belonging to that same Bank of Spain, of the whereabouts of certain of whose property he alone knew the secret.

Damien's three companions had been killed in this attack, his own description circulated to police authorities in every Mediterranean province of the country. He was waiting for the alarm to die down so that he might attempt to leave the city with some small prospect of success.

In a succession of insomniac nights, mosquito-bitten, coffee-nervous, the pair talked together as they had never had leisure or occasion to do previously, and on one such night Damien told Thornton the entire story of the platinum, and its tragic outcome.

When he had finished speaking, the following dialogue took place:

"Why did you never tell me this before?"

"I never tell people things, Señor Thornton, unless I have excellent reason for doing so."

"If you'll forgive me saying so, you seem to have behaved even more stupidly about this platinum than you have recently, about the van."

Damien's gaunt yet handsome face showed no sign of emotion. He lit yet another cigarette and flicked the spent match through the open window. "You say that, Señor Thornton, because you have no feelings. Your mind is the mind of one of the most stupid, rancorous, and insensitive of all European social classes, the middle class of England."

"That may well be so," replied Thornton amiably, "but would you mind telling me why you murdered this second man . . .

Teixal, I believe you said his name was? Uncharitable people might be inclined to believe that you did the job for mercenary reasons . . . because you wished to keep the secret to yourself."

"I killed him," said Damien, "because he came to me with a dishonourable and filthy proposition."

"Namely?"

"He wished," said Damien, "for me to collaborate with him. Once we had the stuff in France we could dispose of it, and share the proceeds."

"Quite, but if he was so keen on private gain why couldn't he do the job himself and cut you out?"

"Because," replied Damien, and he permitted himself the tired ghost of a smile, "because he was not a man of great imagination or initiative."

"I see—and do you really mean to tell me that you yourself never gave the platinum a thought in all those years?"

"No, why should I? It was in safe hiding. That was all that counted."

"Indeed! I should have imagined that, when you arrived in France, your duty was to report the hiding place to the responsible authorities."

"There were no responsible authorities."

"How can you talk such nonsense? There was a Republican Government for years, first in Paris, then in Mexico. For all I know, it may still be in existence."

"There was no one deserving of confidence in that Government."

"Ah, so now we come to the truth! First the platinum belongs to Spain; then to a part of Spain: now, I presume, you intend to make a gift of it to the Narbonne branch of Catalan Socialist Workers Party. I find the declension charming."

"When I have the platinum in France," replied Damien imperturbably, "I shall distribute it among organisations which are actively fighting Franco."

"Really? What an admirable idea. But don't let the information get about too much. The people who sell rusty Lüggers and dud hand-grenades are inclined to put their prices up when they see that hard cash is available."

"I think you may safely leave that question to me, Señor Thornton."

"I'm prepared to leave the whole matter to you, my friend. But

before we do leave it, there is just one other thing I'd like to know."

"Yes?"

"Why do you tell me this . . . now?"

Damien smiled. "For two reasons," he replied. "The first because we happen to be talking at a somewhat dramatic, even tragic, moment, and you will therefore be more inclined to listen to my arguments . . ."

"And the second reason?"

"Because the matter has become one of considerable urgency. We were not the only ones to bury stuff in those mountains. Much of what was hidden was found almost immediately. Every now and then a little more has come to light, but only to-day, fifteen years later, have the Government decided to put the whole search upon a scientific basis."

"How . . . with water diviners?"

"No," said Damien. "They have purchased, from your own country, five hundred mine detectors and in the spring they will be ready to send troops to cover the frontier metre by metre."

"But, my dear fellow, it may be a lifetime before they reach your particular mountain."

"No, ~~you~~ are wrong. A battalion of sappers has already been assigned to Puigcerda." Damien paused. He put aside his cigarette and gazed at his companion intently. "Señor Thornton, it has been good of you to shelter me. I believe you understand that my own safety is of no importance to me except in so far that I must not betray the comrades who sent me here. If I get out of this present mess, and reach France, I shall call on your aid again, Señor Thornton . . . for a task very much more important than the mere saving of one man's skin . . ."

• * * * *

Although it might have seemed so at the time, Damien had not miscalculated. He was obtuse, pig-headed, but his work as a police commissar had taught him to know men, and two years in the Englishman's service had taught him to know Thornton. The operations which Damien envisaged, namely the gradual transfer of the platinum to France, would take place in mountains, and mountains were Thornton's passion and delight. They would take place in conditions of the utmost secrecy, a factor which—no

matter how much he might grumble and cavil at first—would end by titivating Thornton's perpetual urge for clandestinity.

Damien made his choice well, but he made it in no haphazard fashion. Eighteen bars of platinum, each weighing 33 kilos, represented a very considerable cash value in any currency: a value so great that the secret must be entrusted to as few persons as possible; and this the more since he would be unable to control the transfer personally.

In the months following his successful return to France he had become aware that his movements were being followed not only by the French police, a procedure to which he had been accustomed for years, but that now he was being watched also by men sent into France from Spain for this purpose. Damien dared not approach too close to the frontier, and even when in Perpignan or Toulouse he lived in constant fear of being kidnapped. A long line of distinguished refugees, from the Duc d'Enghien to the last President of Catalunya, Luis Companys, had died in proof of the proposition that it was very easy to spirit a man across a frontier.

Nor was this the only disadvantage under which Damien laboured. Prolonged exile is not conducive to honesty. The members of his organisation on both sides of the border, had become, with increasing hardship, venal. Damien had discovered, in matters far less important than this one, that he could trust nobody, least of all men domiciled in Spain, whose movements he was unable to control, and upon whom it would be difficult to take vengeance should they betray him.

It was for this reason that he selected Thornton as his contact, and to Thornton alone gave the map reference and description of the place where the platinum was hidden. He knew from his long study of the Englishman's character that the secret, once confided to him, would be in safe keeping. He also knew that Thornton, who had spent so much time in these same mountains, would be capable of outwitting the Customs officials and the detachments of soldiers who occasionally patrolled them, and that the excitement of the proceedings would be, for him, its own reward.

He considered it decorous, however, when the pair met in Perpignan for a discussion of final arrangements before the first transfer, to offer some more tangible compensation:

"If all goes well, I authorise you, when everything is over, to retain a single bar for your own use."

Thornton had grinned at him: "You authorise me? And by what right, if you please?"

"It is customary, even in government transactions, for agents to receive a commission."

"Thank you for nothing. I don't operate in millions like you people. If I get into financial difficulties I'll take a blow-lamp up with me and cut myself a chunk."

The actual transfers themselves were quite simply organised. Upon receipt of a telegram Thornton proceeded to Puigcerda, where his presence, and his status as a foreigner, excited no suspicion. On the appointed night, working alone, he climbed the mountain, disinterred three bars, wrapped each in several layers of sacking, and carried them one by one to a track junction several hundred yards distant. Thus, he and Damien continued as the only persons who knew the exact position of the hoard.

From the French side, the plan was even more simple. Suspicious of all but his closest associates, Damien employed professional smugglers, men who lived on the frontier and knew every crease and fold of the terrain: men, moreover, who knew better than to ask the nature of the merchandise which they placed upon the backs of their mules. Such men, who were paid handsomely for what amounted to about three hours work, were not difficult to find. For each trip Damien selected a different man from a different village. In this, as in all else connected with the platinum, he reduced his risks to the minimum.

So far, four transfers had been made, and that due to take place to-night was the fifth, and penultimate. After the third trip, Damien and Thornton had met, once again, in Perpignan:

"Now I don't say I'm getting tired of this," Thornton had remarked, "but couldn't you make the next lot the last? Any self-respecting mule can carry 400 kilos. Let's get it over with."

"No," replied Damien. "I agree the danger is small, but it exists all the same. If a mule is taken by the guards I want it to be carrying the smallest amount practicable to make the journey worth while."

"And the muleteers, man? You may choose them from different villages, but do you think they don't talk among each other? Do you think they don't look in the sack as soon as my back is turned?"

"What do I care what they say or see?" said Damien. "They have no choice but to bring the stuff to me."

"Oh, really?" Thornton chose to be sardonic. "If I was dealing with a bunch of unscrupulous brigands like you people I wouldn't think twice—I'd take the loot and bolt with it."

"You give me credit for small intelligence, Señor Thornton," said Damien. "You may not have enquired, but if you do, you will find that all the men I use are married, and the fathers of families."

"Well, what of it?"

"It takes a very hard man indeed to leave his relatives, including small children, exposed to vengeance," said Damien.

"Now perhaps you can understand why I brought you two with me?" said Thornton. With his gloved hand he raised the car window, then waved in farewell to the hotel proprietor, who stood upon the pavement, smiling as his clients departed. The proprietor had waylaid the party twice, in corridors, chucked Barbara's chin, complimented Maruja on her beauty, enquired archly after Thornton's health and insisted on serving them at table personally.

"It is not so much the police whom the wicked must fear in life," continued Thornton, "as the curious: that's to say, rather more than half of humanity with too much time upon its hands."

"You still haven't told me why you brought us," said Maruja patiently.

"I'd have thought it was obvious. This is my seventh trip to these parts. My face has grown familiar. *'What can he be up to?'* say the ladies in their window seats behind lace curtains. *'It can surely be no good,'* reply the tradespeople, as they pause while slicing ham. And so I thought it best to bring my wife and little child with me. With you here, I have no need to make evasive statements in Catalan."

"And couldn't you bring your real wife with you?" said Martja.

"No, dear. She doesn't like the mountains, except in places where they have funiculars."

"Or horses."

Thornton looked at her sharply. "Do you mean anything especial by that remark?" he said.

"No."

"Then don't make any more which resemble it."

Deeply hurt, Maruja was silent. In a corner, heavy with lunch and too many cakes, Barbara dozed. Gently, Maruja tucked a rug about the child. But it was not for ten minutes, and until Thornton had engaged the car upon a side road which led upwards into the mountains, that she ventured another remark: "Shan't we be stopping the night at the hotel?"

"No."

"Should we buy something to eat, then?"

"You'll find everything you require, including blankets, in one of the suitcases."

Blinking to keep back her tears, Maruja stared straight ahead at the brown moorland. She would have liked to produce a handkerchief and blow her nose, but did not dare to do so. After a while, Thornton, noticing something peculiar about her hunched shoulders and set face, looked at her in the driving mirror.

Then he laid his hand upon her knee. "I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't mean to be so rude."

"Won't you tell me anything at all?" she pleaded. "It isn't that I'm inquisitive but I'd so much like to help you if I can."

"You're helping me just by sitting there." He pointed to the deserted land on either side of them. "As you see, it can be lonely up here when night begins to fall."

Something in his tone of voice caused Maruja to shiver. She put her arm around the shoulders of the sleeping child.

"Is there any danger?" she said, for she had seen him put the pistol in the pocket of his overcoat.

"None that I know of," he replied. "We're archæologists. That's what you'll say, anyway, if somebody stops you."

Maruja now considered it safe to blow her nose, since he had already seen the worst. From behind the handkerchief she stole a glance at him, and was surprised at the grimness of his expression. During the drive from Barcelona and at lunch, too, in the hotel he had been so amusing, even gay. Maruja stroked Barbara's clenched hand. She tried in the gathering dusk to see in which direction they were heading, but this was difficult because the road, little better than a cart-track now, climbed steadily, in constant curves.

A further twenty minutes and Thornton slowed the car, looked

down at the cluster of lights in the valley, then, as if satisfied, switched on his sidelights.

"Feeling cold?" he said.

"No, not especially. Why . . . are we very high up?"

"About fifteen hundred metres. It isn't far now. I had to do it on foot before and, believe me, the second or third time it ceases to be amusing."

"Barbara's sleeping like a baby," she said.

"So will you. Don't worry: you're going to have very nearly a complete roof over your heads: in fact you'll be much more comfortable than in that damned hotel, and no gossip either."

Two minutes later he turned the car off the road, to the left, into what appeared to be the entrance to a large quarry.

"Right! Here we are," he said cheerfully. "Everybody disembark, please. The Thornton hotel is a hundred yards ahead of you, madam."

The noise of doors slamming woke Barbara. She looked about her, at first in some alarm, and then with interest.

"Have I missed anything?" she said. "Where are we? What is this, Papa: a treasure hunt?" Barbara had a tendency to classify the more unexpected events of life in terms of games which she had learnt at school. "No, not for you . . . for me; perhaps," said Thornton, who was busy manhandling suitcases. "Now come along, both of you. I want my supper."

"*Candles!*" cried Maruja suddenly in an anguished voice. She was sure he had forgotten them.

"Take a look at this," said Thornton. He opened a suitcase, and from beneath a pile of blankets produced an enormous storm lantern: "Better light it here," he said. "Then go straight ahead along the path. I'll follow with the bags. He removed his belt and, employing it as a sling, hitched two suitcases over his shoulders.

Maruja lit the lanterns. "Shall I go?" she said.

"Yes, please. Take her hand, Barbara."

Maruja advanced cautiously. The path was smooth. The place was, she saw, indeed a quarry, although apparently disused. After about a hundred yards, and when it seemed that they must disappear into the quarry face, the path suddenly swung upwards, through rough grass. Maruja could now see a square, grey shape; then the outline of windows.

"Is this it?"

"Yes, go in," said Thornton.

She entered. The door lay ajar. The ground floor of the house consisted of a single room, unfurnished except for two or three broken chairs and a pile of straw in one corner. A staircase without banisters led upwards to other rooms which it would evidently be unsafe to investigate if one were to judge by the cracked plaster of the ceiling, and the naked ribs of smoke-blackened rafters.

"Isn't there a kitchen?" she asked.

"Don't be so civilised," said Thornton, and he pointed to the open fireplace and the pile of stones, arranged circularly, for cooking, beneath the chimney. "There's a well outside, too . . . and, what's more, there's a bucket. I'll bring you some water directly."

When he returned with his full and slopping pailful, Maruja had already lit the fire with a pile of dry twigs, and was fanning it. She looked up at him. Her face was radiant.

"Oh, I'm enjoying this," she said. "I can't tell you how much I'm enjoying myself."

"Don't tell me you were a Girl Guide, were you?"

"I was . . . I was, and you've never even asked me."

"There are a lot of things I've never asked you."

But Maruja was not listening. She was searching about her, turning over straw and piles of sacking. "But how am I going to cook my soup?" she said presently.

"Soup? What do you want with soup, woman?"

"Well, you don't think we're going to dine on tinned sardines, do you? With all this tunny and the tomatoes and the peas I can make a beautiful soup."

During this conversation Barbara, unobserved, had climbed the staircase. Now she stared down at them, with a dusty face, from a hole in the ceiling.

"Cooee . . . put your hands up or I'll shoot."

"Come down here at once and help to cut tomatoes," shouted her father sternly.

"I believe you don't dare to come up yourself," said the child, accusingly.

"Only because I'm too heavy for the staircase," he replied. "Come down at once."

"Ten *pesetas*, then."

"All right . . . all right, but for God's sake come down: I can hear the bloody ceiling cracking."

Three quarters of an hour later the room was in some semblance of order, the soup had been made, and eaten, and all three of them reclined upon the straw before the fire, sucking oranges.

"I hope there are no bugs in this house," said Maruja, examining samples of straw.

"There won't be unless I brought them," said Thornton. "I shouldn't think anyone else has slept here for the last ten years."

"Are we far from the frontier?"

"We're almost on it: in fact the country you've been dining in probably depends upon which side of the room you sit."

He looked at his watch surreptitiously, but Maruja saw him do this.

"What time is your appointment?" she said innocently.

"I have no appointment."

"Well, whatever you have to do?"

"In about half an hour."

"And I really can't come with you?"

"And leave Barbara? Don't be silly, girl. You'd best go to sleep. I shall be back about midnight. Meanwhile I'd like a little more of that coffee."

She rose, and served him. "These Army mess-tins take one back a few years," he said. "I don't know why, but coffee always tastes so much nicer in them." He looked across the straw at Barbara, who, always adaptable, was reading a book which he had packed for her. The book was the *Just So Stories*.

"What story are you reading?" he asked.

"*The Cat that walked by itself*," said Barbara.

"Oh? I meant to cut that one out before you got to it. It's a damned immoral tale in praise of men and dogs. In fact, if I'd known my aunt was giving you that book, I'd have stopped her." He turned to Maruja. "How is your aunt, by the way . . . do you still live with her?"

"She's very well. She still maintains I've no right to a latch-key."

"And your sister?"

"I almost never see her. She spends all her free time dancing."

"And you have no other relatives at all?"

"No."

"Why?"

"They died: people do die, you know."

He sipped his coffee. "Do you remember when you answered my advertisement?" he said.

"Yes."

"What did I say?"

"You said I was the nicest among ninety, but that I wouldn't put up with you for a month." She looked at him. "But I *have* lasted . . . it's more than six months now."

Thornton was silent for a moment, then he took up her hand, and kissed it. "Yes, dear," he said, "but what you omit from that statement is the reason why, and the reason why is because there've been lots of hard words and none at all of this." He kissed her hand again, then rose.

"I'd better go now. I've a walk ahead of me." He stroked his daughter's head. "As for you . . . go to sleep," he said, "don't keep Maruja awake with your chattering."

"Yeth, Daddy." Barbara knew that she could always infuriate her father by lisping. He cuffed her playfully, then walked to the door.

Maruja ran out after him. "Tell me," she said, "you promise me there is no danger."

"Don't be a stupid girl," he said.

She flung her arms around him. She thrust her face against the buttons of his coat. He disengaged himself, then kissed her in the forehead.

"It does no good to be emotional," he said. "There is no danger, none at all."

"Then why have you got that gun?"

"Because I like guns. Now that's enough: go back inside. We've no time for argument."

Maruja watched him set off up the path, but when she went inside the house it was only for a moment, and to kneel beside Barbara.

"Listen, darling . . ."

"Yes."

"If I shut the door tight, will you be all right alone? I want to go after your father."

"If he'd wanted you, he'd have said so," remarked Barbara.

"All the same, I think I'd better follow him."

"If you ask me, I think that's what's got a lot of people into trouble," said Barbara. She drew a pile of straw beneath her head. "Well, do as you please . . . I don't care. Why shouldn't I be all right alone? I'm ten, not two."

"Are you sure you have enough blankets, darling?" Maruja felt guilty.

"Stop fussing. Go after him," said Barbara.

Outside, the moon was rising; a new moon, a thin yellow crescent. The sky was cloudy. The wind stirred the heather. Maruja set off along the path.

It sometimes happens, when one wakes up in the night, or goes out from a crowded room into the darkness, that the lips of Nature seem shut tight. Such periods of calm do not endure. The soul becomes uneasy, the body is the victim of the first sound, the first shudder.

The path was a white streak, not difficult to follow. Upwards it led, always upwards; no doubt towards the summit of the mountain. And the peace of the night, which no sound disturbed, except the low sigh of the wind, the very *silence* of the night seemed to the girl to be corporate, possessed of senses, and of a will if not to harm, at least to mystify: a will in which ~~the~~ passions and the thoughts remained obscure as the night itself, distant and morose.

Maruja calculated that she had been climbing for about ten minutes before she reached a cairn, denoting the summit. Here she halted, and looked down. Ahead, she saw that the French slope of the mountain was dark with young pine trees. She could see no sign, however, of Thornton, but presently she heard a dull sound, repeated at regular intervals: a sound which she could not identify. Well aware that, even in this thin moonlight, her silhouette might show against the skyline, she went downhill, in the direction of the sounds, and when she judged herself sufficiently close to them, took cover in the wet and dewy douche of a clump of bushes.

Maruja waited. She knew that something was about to happen, and that, presently, she would be a witness to it. No two moments of solitude are quite alike, for one is never alone in quite the same manner. "*What is he doing : . . when will he come back to me?*" thought Maruja, yet she thought this without anxiety. He was a

part, as she herself, crouching in these bushes, was a part, of this wild, unpeopled country, in which words, objects, the silence even, spoke a different language.

Presently, she heard the sound of voices, saw the flash of at least two torches. She left her hiding place, crept nearer, concealed herself in another clump of bushes, further down the slope. She did not feel the cold, but, peering between parted leaves, sought to distinguish the silhouettes of men. The voices were louder, nearer. But in the darkness, she saw nothing.

Methodically, she examined successive segments of the night. She had a strange, oppressive sentiment of having been in this same place, behind this bush, before. It seemed to her that time was standing still, that past events, that what was now about to occur before her eyes, and events which the future held in store, formed in this moment a single and enchanted whole.

Now she heard another sound; the distinctive clop and rasp of a mule's iron-shod foot against stone. Then they came into view: Thornton, whom she recognised by his shoulders, and another man who held the bridle of the mule. The pair halted not thirty feet away from her.

"Well, that's everything. Good luck to you on the return trip."

"*Gracias, señor.*"

The two men shook hands.

"When you see Heras, give him my best wishes, please."

"*Con mucho gusto, señor.*"

"*Bueno . . . adios, hombre.*"

"*Adios, señor.*"

Thornton turned away. The man with the mule did not move, however, and presently Maruja saw the reason why: a second man had detached himself from the shadow of the trees.

"*Just a moment, señor . . . a minute of your valuable time.*"

Both men held guns in their hands. Thornton wheeled round, confronted them. "Yes," she heard him say in a voice which she did not recognise.

"I took the precaution of bringing a friend with me, as you see," said the man with the mule. "We know what is in these sacks. It would be as well if you would tell us where the rest of it is hidden."

There was silence for a moment.

"Don't be stupid, man," said Thornton. "You'll get nothing

out of me; and unless you get moving immediately I'll see that when you reach France you're dealt with in a way you won't enjoy particularly."

"We have thought of that," said the man with the mule. "We're prepared to spend all night on you if necessary but you're going to talk. Come now, where is the rest of it hidden?"

"In the pot with your grandfather's pipi," said Thornton. He stepped backward.

"Take your hands away from your overcoat," said the man with the mule. "Come on . . . above your head, please, and look sharp about it."

Thornton did as he was told.

"Take him, Pépé," said the man with the mule. "Don't knock him out. Just take his gun."

The second man advanced cautiously, until he stood before Thornton. "Why not be nice?" he said amiably. "We're two: you're one. It seems such a silly argument."

Thornton said nothing.

"All right," said the second man. "You weren't properly brought up, I see. Somebody must have taught you that silence was golden. But don't worry, I'll teach you otherwise."

Flexing his leg he kicked Thornton in the crutch and as the latter fell he hit him, side-face, with the butt of the gun.

Until now, Maruja had remained silent. The soft light of the moon, the dark shapes of the three men, the wet odour of the mule: these appeared to her as if part of some design, yet when she saw Thornton fall, and that he did not rise, she began to shout instinctively.

"Look out . . . look out . . . the Carabineros are coming. They'll be here any minute!"

Maruja hardly knew what she had said, but what she said proved quite sufficient. The two aggressors stood, immobile, for several seconds: then, as if by a common accord and impulsion, they turned and ran downhill, abandoning the still recumbent man, abandoning the mule, even.

Maruja rushed forward. She knelt beside Thornton. His hands were clutched between his legs; the right side of his face was dark with blood.

"So it's you, is it," he said sourly. "I might have known as much. Will you never listen to anything I say? Now I've got a

bloody mule on my hands and I'll have to bury the stuff again. I wish you'd learn not to interfere."

"It's just as well I did," she said.

"Nonsense. Two bloody little peasants: I could have dealt with them in no time. Here . . . don't stand there like an asparagus," he held out his hands: "Help me to stand up."

When he was upon his feet, she watched him reel about. "You see," she said, "you see." Appalled at his ingratitude, she was almost glad to see him suffer.

"I may, but you certainly don't," he grumbled. "My complaint is peculiarly masculine." He staggered away into the bushes. She heard him cursing, then coughing. Presently he returned. "I suppose a mule can trot behind a car, can't it?" he said. "In any case, this one will have to: I daren't leave it up here, wandering loose." Suddenly he turned, and grinned at her:

"I'm sorry," he said. "What a fool I was; without your little intervention they'd have had me nicely."

"Yes?" she said.

"Yes," he said. "You haven't got a handkerchief, have you? I can't bear the taste of blood."

The mule approached, thrust its head forward, nuzzling Maruja's arm.

"D'you think he's lonely?" she said, as she dabbed with her handkerchief, at blood.

Seven

FOR A FAT MAN WITH HIS MOUTH FULL OF PINS, Ceferino was both agile and talkative. "Stick your right hip out, darling," he said, but when Dominique obeyed, he pinched her cruelly. "Not *that* way," he said, "I want none of that bathing-pool nonsense on these premises. A girl in one of my gowns is just a smile, and some stuffing." He coaxed the hip back into position, seized one of Dominique's feet, set it at right angles to her body. In point of fact, these were not Ceferino's gowns at all, for he had not designed them, but he was head cutter to the establishment, and so it came to much the same thing.

"Good! Now hold that, and don't move." Shorting, he knelt

at her feet arranged the pins in the folds of the dress. This done, he patted her stomach: "You've eaten too much lunch again. You'll never lose those two kilos if you go on like this."

"But I only had an apple and a piece of toast," protested Dominique.

"Then it must be wind," said Ceferino. "You'll have to see a doctor. Oh, my God, these frills . . . these folds . . . these fripperies. When will women go back to simple classical lines? You look like a peacock who's been for a bathe."

"Perhaps you've forgotten where to put the pins?" suggested Dominique, and she tickled his bald head with her finger-tips.

"Don't you give me any of your insolence, young woman, or I'll put a pin where you won't enjoy it." He stood up. "There! I don't say I'd care to be seen out with you myself but no doubt what you've got on will do for our Argentine clients. That reminds me: did I ever tell you the one about the Japanese?"

"No, I don't think so," said Dominique.

"No? Well, this Japanese was walking down the Ramblas one evening. The Japanese are passionate—everybody says so—and this fellow had been on board ship for six weeks, so you can imagine what he was looking for."

"I shouldn't think he had much difficulty in finding it," observed Dominique.

"No, of course not: there were ten of them after him immediately, but I must say he had the good taste to choose a Catalan."

"Ah? And then what happened?"

"What d'you think happened? I know a very nice little hotel myself if you want the address: but you must be careful—that kind of thing is fattening, too."

The house telephone on the table sounded. Ceferino picked up the receiver. "Yes?" he said; then gloomily: "Oh, all right." He replaced the receiver, turned to Dominique. "Now don't muck up that dress while I'm away, there's a good girl: I'll want to finish it. Have you got a good book? No? Then take my tip: when a girl has a book she puts the lipstick smears on the pages, not on her dress: there's nothing like literature. Why, that Hungarian girl we had here last year barely knew her alphabet when she first arrived, but by the time I'd finished with her she was reading Lope de Vega."

"What happened to her?" said Dominique.

"She went away with a man, to Madrid," said Ceferino disgustedly. "That's the trouble with women: they can't be serious for more than two months before they begin to fear that their legs must have stuck together.

"Do your nails," he said. "That's the next best sedative."

Obediently, when he was gone, Dominique began to do her nails. She looked out through the double windows, across the balustrade, at the naked trees, and the Métro sign, in the Paseo de Gracia. This was her second week of work in this place and many things continued to surprise her: this private dressing-room, for example, with its powder-blue walls and three-way mirror, the weighing machine in a corner, the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus upon the wall, the second-Empire divan which filled a corner.

Dominique looked out upon the great, wide-street. Immediately opposite her window lay the stepped exit of the Métro station. Every three or four minutes, fifty people clambered up the steps and emerged into the open air, walking disdainfully past a man who endeavoured to sell them a bag of roast chestnuts: in ten minutes Dominique did not see this man sell a single bag. Meanwhile, other people were continually entering the mouth of the Métro, and so there was always something to see. When the mannequins were not actually showing clothes to customers, or acting as lay figures for the cutters, as these latter perfected new dresses, their time was their own. Each possessed one of these little cubicles, her private sitting-room, in which she could relax.

Dominique painted her nails, with broad, sure strokes, her face intent, the mind within engaged upon review of a conversation which had taken place the previous evening.

"You want to leave me?" he had said, her husband.

"Yes: it seems to me to be the only way."

There was a noise outside, audible even through the double window-panes. The chestnut vendor was being questioned by a policeman client.

"But I don't want you to leave me."

"Couldn't you do something to retain me, then?"

"Ah, God knows, I wish I could. . . . Ah, God knows, that's what I'd like to do."

She had looked at him in deep and genuine surprise.

"Do you still love me, then, Desmond?"

"Who else do you think that I could ever love now?"

"You told me yourself that I should find some work to do. Well, I found some."

"Yes . . . all by yourself, too—all by yourself."

"Listen," she had said. "There were forty girls there. They chose two; and then, half an hour later, they chose me, as the third."

"Hm!" he answered, "the ramifications of Barcelona society are even more devious than I had imagined."

"How very typical of you. Desmond . . . how typically ungracious."

Their conversations were always like that now; a statement, perhaps not controversial in itself yet appearing to be so by reason of some inflection of the voice, or of an accompanying gesture, would be followed by an inconclusive exchange of fire, which in its turn left both parties irritable, eager to suffer new offence.

Not once had Thornton referred to the encounter in the restaurant, now more than a month distant. But Dominique knew that he was far from inactive: if she laid down her handbag somewhere, before proceeding to the bathroom, she would find it, upon her return, slightly displaced: her clothes in the wardrobes, beneath which she had always hidden bills she did not wish him to see until some moment particularly favourable for their display, would now be discovered ruffled by prying fingers. She noted that he had even investigated a loose tile on the bedroom floor, searching no doubt for compromising letters.

"But he must be mad," Paco Llawneras had commented, when she told him of these things.

"No, not at all. It's simply that his mind is tortuous. He's used to secrecy in everything. When he doesn't find it, he invents it."

"But it's so dishonourable. . . . Surely one blazing row is so much better than all this furtive business, with him sometimes playing cat, and sometimes mouse?"

Yet, in this matter, Paco stood in error, for although he did not know it yet, and would not do so for several months, Dominique's character was quite as conspiratorial as that of her husband. For example, except upon those days when a fashion show was pending, she left her work for the luncheon break at half-past one. She could quite easily have been home within a few minutes, but chose, instead, to pretend that she was not officially free until

three-quarters of an hour later. Her husband must have known that this was a fiction; it was one among several in which, for some reason, he preferred to acquiesce.

"But he must be aware that I meet you every day for a cocktail at that time?" protested Paco. "You say, he appears quiet, but isn't that perhaps because he is employing a detective agency to spy on us, or some such nonsense?"

"It's obvious you don't know Desmond," she had replied, with something of the severity of a professor rebuking a pupil who had failed to study an essential textbook. "It must all go on in his *mind*, don't you understand: a bunch of squalid detectives with their typed reports would spoil the whole drama for him."

But Paco could see no drama, merely indecision and deceit. "But don't you wish to leave him? You say he is tired of you, as well. You keep telling me it's over: that it's been dead for at least a year." What riled Paco above all was his own position, which he considered to be both equivocal and undignified.

Dominique sighed. "Can anything be really over?" she said. "There's all the past, you see . . ." She hesitated, searching for some simile, some explanation which Paco would understand. Presently, she found one. "I read in a book once," she said, "that when the young cuckoo comes out of the egg it soon gets rid of its little foster-brothers. Over the top of the nest they go, and for hours afterwards, if you put marbles in the nest, he'll push them out: but after a few days the murderous urge . . . the instinct or whatever it is . . . fades away entirely . . . and the baby will live quite happily even if you put another cuckoo or a dozen marbles in beside him."

"I don't follow you." And Paco had frowned, as he always did when she spoke to him in parables.

"Darling Paco, I didn't expect you to."

He had grunted, pleased at the endearment, but angry because she chose to tease him. "Well, I can tell you that I'm very glad I don't understand . . . very glad that I have simple feelings. What is the point of people torturing themselves, and everyone around them, in the way that he does? Why can't everyone be happy?"

"But, Paco, how can he be happy if I belong to you, and yet he still has me on his hands?"

"I don't know, and I don't care: I only know I hate him."

Dominique was not Paco's mistress: in this matter she had proved herself implacable. He was permitted to meet her at midday, and in the evenings, too, when having left her work he drove her to the riding school. When her lesson was over she would sometimes consent to dine with him, yet on these occasions she invariably insisted that she must be home by eleven-thirty.

"But why . . . but why?" he would say, seeking her hand, her waist, beneath the tablecloth, and when she drew away, upsetting pepper-pots, or mangling bread.

She never answered. Instead, she would make him fetch his car, and drop her in a side street near her home.

"Good-night," she would say in a formal voice, hand extended, having first retreated to the pavement. Paco, baffled, would then watch her walk away.

"If he beats her," he thought grimly, "I'll kill him." For Dominique had told him many things to her husband's disadvantage, so that Paco now pictured an almost Levantine tyrant, cruel, slothful, abstruse in wickedness.

In point of fact, Thornton neither beat nor did he strike his wife; even upon those nights when she came in very much later than the hours hitherto mentioned—at two or three o'clock of a clammy winter morning; having dined, so she maintained, with one or other of the girls with whom she worked. On these occasions Thornton, if in bed, would pretend to be asleep; if in the sitting-room, he would look up without comment from his eternal newspaper, and then, with much display of courtly ceremony, and an ironic facial expression which he seemed able to maintain indefinitely, would fetch her coffee from the kitchen hob.

Actually, Thornton was not often in bed when she came, because bed was, to him, Canossa. Bed meant that two bodies which had covered in their several directions many kilometres in the course of the day must now confront night—black night—the inescapable: exacting its tribute of sleep, and paying for closed eyes with weird, uneasy dreams. And often in the mornings, waking, both he and his wife would find that sleep had done for them what consciousness could not: their arms were clasped about each other; their warmth was one.

And there they lay, facing each other, or back to back, buttocks against buttocks, each waiting for no more than the advancing hand, messenger of friendship, the touch of a finger in a place

known before; in the time when their love was still bountiful.

And one night, being thirsty, he went out to drink water, and, coming back, he must have disturbed her, because, although he did not switch on the light, he saw her head rise, and heard her say, urgently, with terror in her voice:

"Paco . . . Paco."

"What did you say?"

Thoroughly awake now, she switched on the bedside light and looked at him. "I was asleep," she answered in a level voice. "Did I speak?"

"You said a man's name."

"I was dreaming. You were smoking a cigarette, weren't you?" Her composure, as always, was remarkable. "Yes—look" she continued, "you've still got it in your hand. I must have seen the glow. That's a proof that you have dreams in a fraction of a second." He said nothing. She continued talking. "I dreamt that I was in a wood, all alone, and that there was a troop of horses thundering down on me."

"What a pity," he said, "that the right person didn't arrive to save you. Your dream, incidentally, although adapted to your present equestrian circumstances, is a very common means employed by the subconscious to express a general feeling of insecurity."

Dominique listened to her husband in silence: not so much because her situation was delicate and invidious as because silence was the best means of dealing with him when he grew pompous.

In Dominique's cubicle, as she thought of this, the house telephone sounded. "Will you please come downstairs, Mademoiselle Thibaud," a voice said. "We have two clients here. The dresser is waiting for you."

"At once, Señor Belen." Thank God, she thought, my nails are nearly dry.

Dominique put on her wrap, went down the corridor towards the staircase: the showrooms stood upon the floor beneath. On the left side of this corridor were the doors of other cubicles. One of these now opened. A girl leant backwards, askew on a tilted chair. This girl was named Angéles.

"What are you going to show, Dommy?"

"I don't know: those sport clothes, I suppose." Because she was

built fully, and therefore unfashionably: because her body made use of all three dimensions, the directors of the firm were a little nervous about allowing Dominique to show evening gowns and cocktail dresses; but the deck-chair, the raffia cactus, and the beach back-cloth of photographic studios—these she knew only too well: so well indeed that, in this weather, she required two tubes of aspirin a week to conjure the constant threat of flu.

"Smile at them, sweetheart: you never do," said Angéles.

Dominique passed on, descended stairs, entered the dressing-room, peeped through a spyhole set in the doorway, at the clients. There were three clients: middle-aged, glossy women, dressed in that sartorial clash of primary colours which immediately denotes the South American. Behind the women, by the bow windows, the husbands hovered, swarthy, well-dressed men much at their ease, prepared to pay, but also to repay themselves for this hour of boredom by a close inspection of the mannequin.

In the dressing-room, Teresa, who had been with the firm since its inception and seen many models come and go, had laid out the four dresses which Dominique must wear, upon a divan. Dominique inspected the dresses. Two were familiar: she had worn them, indeed, more than twenty times in the past week. She was pleased to recognise her favourite, an effervescent skirt in grey tulle with puckered plaits held in position by lateral bands of watered silk. At the end of the month, when she was paid, she would be allowed to select a dress, too, and this one would be her choice.

The manager, Belen, entered. "He was the least talented, intellectually, but the most imposing, physically, of the three brothers, the owners of the firm, and for this reason his fief ran in these showrooms, where his spoken word lent persuasion to the tangible evidence of the family talent.

Belen watched Dominique slip into the first dress. This dress was flower-printed, red and black, on Aleutian gauze. Belen frowned.

"You've changed your hair style again," he remarked.

"Yes," replied Dominique. She knew that his opinion was of no importance unless supported by that of his brothers.

"Well, please go in, the clients are waiting." He spoke drily, irritated as always by her self-possession, which he had found no means of shaking.

Dominique made her entrance. The movements were simple: she had learnt them in a day, and performed them now with grace . . . the initial sweep, the several turns, the pause with the skirt lifted. As she passed before the group for the second time, one of the women held up a hand, and asked if she might inspect the material. Dominique approached, her face disdainful. She held up her skirt by the hem, watched the woman fingering it.

"This gauze is French, isn't it?" said the woman; then, perhaps wishing to show some evidence of amiability: "Have you ever been in France?"

"I *am* French," said Dominique. She watched with satisfaction as the woman lost, in a rising flush, her former air of assurance.

"That is easy to see," interposed one of the husbands by the window, gallantly. He was undoubtedly this particular woman's husband because she turned her head, throwing him a furious glance, a compound of spite and malice. Belen advanced, prepared to intervene: such small scenes as this were not infrequent. Very probably, however, the woman would have been prepared to let the matter drop had she not, unfortunately, observed the mocking expression on Dominique's face.

"And could you not get work in your own country?" she enquired.

"Oh yes," replied Dominique. "And you, in yours, too, I see."

The three husbands laughed heartily at this remark but their women sat with pursed mouths and wooden faces. From Belen, who had remained inactive throughout the exchange, there came an anguished cough. Hearing it, Dominique curtsied, which she was in no way obliged to do, then left the salon. She showed the remaining three dresses in complete silence, but each time as she swept out through the door she directed towards the group of men a fleeting smile.

"What a little spitfire you are, dear," remarked Teresa, as she helped Dominique into her dressing-gown.

"Well, she started it . . . not me. I won't put up with insolence from meat-packer's daughters. Anyway . . . they'll buy. If you don't believe me, come and listen."

The pair pressed their ears against the door. After some argument, in which the voices of the husbands were dominant, all three of the four dresses were disposed of; although none, it

seemed, to Dominique's recent antagonist, who could be heard saying, haughtily, that she preferred Balenciaga models.

Incidents such as this one, and they were frequent, provided Dominique with considerable amusement. Very beautiful women, she had discovered, whether accompanied by men or not, were never aggressive, nor were old ladies tiresome. The majority of clients, however, belonged to neither of these two categories; were, instead, middle-aged; and their manners were of an intolerable and truculent vulgarity, better suited to a slave market than to the salons of a fashion house.

"Is it because they are jealous of us, do you think?" Dominique had once asked Angéles.

"My dear, they have money: we have figures. If you had a face like a mule and were fifteen pounds overweight, and you saw a pretty girl wearing a dress you simply had to buy, though you well knew it meant agony with corsets trying to get into it . . . wouldn't you be in rather a bad temper?"

Dominique went upstairs; she paused by the open door of Angéles's cubicle. Angéles was reading one of the illustrated papers which invariably littered the floor of her dressing-room.

"It says here that I must take particular care of my digestion because I am going to meet a dark man," she said. "But I know so many dark men. I do wish they'd be more original."

Dominique laughed, and passed on: of the four girls with whom she worked, she much preferred Angéles because the most natural. It was not that the others were stupid girls: very far from it, but their range of interests was restricted to men, and clothes, and ways of amusing oneself, whereas Angéles was prepared to take an active interest in any subject which chanced to catch her eye in the newspaper.

"What is all this about space ships and trips to the moon?" she would say. "I've been hearing about it since childhood. Couldn't you get your husband interested in the moon, dear? Buy him some rockets: you never know—if he took to the idea it might be a way out of all your troubles." The daughter of a minor civil servant in Madrid, Angéles's philosophy was simple:

"My dear," she had said, on Dominique's first day, "I can see by your large, shining eyes that you imagine yourself at the outset of a brilliant career. Very likely you are: but not in the way you imagine. I don't know how things are in France, but here in Spain

there are conventions about everything, and the ones about mannequins are vigorously applied."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, go along with you, you can't be as innocent as all that, surely? Especially when you start off with the glorious advantage of a complacent husband: we others are not so lucky."

Normally, Dominique would have been angry at this, but Angéles's tone was amicable, quite without malice. "Why is it different for mannequins?" she had asked, peaceably.

"You really want to know? Well, look what they pay us, just to begin with . . . twelve hundred *pesetas* a month: about a fifth of what we'd get in any other country. No one can live on that; and, indeed, we're not expected to. It's just meant to be our stepping stone."

"Stepping stone to what?"

"To men, of course. In this country it's a man's world. Have you ever seen an independent woman? You know you haven't, because such a thing is quite unknown. But the low wages are only one half of the male pincers: the other half, and the one which has the cutting edge, is called morality."

"I don't care what people say," said Dominique. "I never did, and never shall."

"Well, that's just as well, darling, because they'll say it all the same. In Spain people have the labels ready and they make sure they stick." Angéles lifted her pretty hand, began to tick off the indictment on fingers. "In Spain, there are only three classes of women, and don't the first two find life dull! There are married women . . . there are people's daughters waiting to be married, because they don't know what lies in store for them . . . and there are others: and those others are all bad and wicked girls, very nice to sleep with or set up in a flat, but not to be allowed in public places, except perhaps a theatre or a night-club."

"And are you a bad girl, Angéles?"

"I don't consider myself one, darling, but I can't live on buns and milk, can I? Besides, what would my mother say if I didn't send her money every month?"

This conversation had disturbed Dominique because it so strongly resembled another with her husband, which had occurred a few days before, when she had first announced her engagement as a mannequin. Thornton had looked up, not from a newspaper this

time but, in the kitchen, from above a pot of soup which he was stirring. He was subject to these bouts of culinary fever: the dishes which he devised were often tasty and original, but the attendant mess, the trails of flour and onion peel, were such as to cause Pepita to grow pale whenever he declared that he would make a meal.

"Ah yes?" he said. "With whom?"

"At Belén's."

"I suppose you might do worse. I'm told the three brothers are so jealous of each other that when one of them comes into a room, there's always another close behind." He added pepper to his soup. "And so a girl has a chance to live in peace . . . during working hours, anyway."

"How ridiculous you are, Desmond, you reduce everything to terms of sex."

"Well, so do most people, you know, when they're dealing with women . . . and particularly in this country, and in the modish little world which you propose to grace. Incidentally, apart from your figure, you have one of the essential qualifications for success: the *demi-monde* of Barcelona is largely staffed by members of your nationality."

She watched him poking at his soup, verifying carrots. She would have liked to spit in it.

"How hateful you are—how absolutely odious! You sneer at me because I don't work; but when I get a job you do everything in your power to discourage me. The truth is that you want to keep me down . . . down . . . under your thumb, dependent upon you. You're jealous of everything, and everybody."

"Oh, do you think so? . . . perhaps there's something in what you say, but then you keep saying, too, that I'm so indifferent, that I take no interest in your activities: you can't have it both ways, you know. Anyway, we've been into this question of jobs for married ladies before, haven't we? Several times, in fact. For example, there was the occasion when you wanted to become an actress. A lot of women seem to suffer from that disease after their first child. I suppose it's a way of symbolising their lost independence: 'Look at me,' one can hear them saying, 'I could have been Bernhardt but for baby and that hateful mess snoring on the other side of the bed.' You ought to try this soup, by the way: I can guarantee that it's not fattening."

"Oh, you're so amusing, aren't you—but when I wanted to open a beauty parlour there was no end to the obstacles you put in my way: and as for getting any money out of you, I might have been dealing with Shylock."

He put aside his ladle, wiped his hands upon something which she recognised, with a cry of rage, as one of her best scarves.

"I had no money at the time, as you know very well," he said. "Now, when you could have as much as you like within reason, you don't want any at all. If I may say so, that's very symptomatic: opposition is required, the cruel, unfeeling husband; the sulky Sultan who won't be nice any more because he can't ring any changes with a harem of one."

"Oh, I want to leave you . . . I want to leave you. Give me that scarf at once."

He handed her the scarf.

"Yes, of course you do: like a child in a swimming-bath with its rubber wings. *'It must be so nice up the deep end,'* you think. *'Soon I'll be able to do the crawl, and then I can put this horrid rubber float away in a dusty cupboard.'*" He broke off; Geneviève had entered the kitchen, and was tugging at his trousers. He bent, hoisted the child upon his shoulders. "You want to live on your own?" he continued. "All right, do so if you absolutely must . . . but don't do it here. This isn't France, and such gestures are liable to be misunderstood in ways which would hurt your pride considerably." He caressed his daughter's cheek. "Don't pull all my hair out, darling," he said. "It seems that I may need it for another venture in the marriage market."

Dominique had looked at him, then "Yes," she said bitterly, "that's the way you talk this evening, all tolerance and understanding, but to-morrow you'll be begging me to stay, or throwing my clothes into bags and ordering me to get out of the house at once: depending on whether Pepita has the coffee ready when you shout for it or not. There's only one thing certain with you, Desmond, and that's that you're never in the same mood four hours running."

"Is that so surprising? Don't you think it might be because I never know what I'm going to be accused of next? I honestly believe you've reached a stage now when if you ladder your stocking I'm the evil genius responsible . . . Oh, I don't deny that I share the blame: I knew perfectly well, when we married,

that things would come to this, but I preferred to think they wouldn't. Now—and let's face it—you've reached a point where your desire to go out into the world has become a raging itch, like eczema . . . and, of course, you can't do that, and live with me."

"What charming similes you choose, don't you, Desmond! And why can't I do it, if you please? Thousands of married women live independent lives, why shouldn't I? It's the most natural thing in the world, or so it would seem to anyone but you."

"I'll tell you why," he said, and he put the child down in the empty laundry basket which was one of her favourite hiding places: "I'll tell you why: because what you want, really, is not independence at all—but excitement, variety and adulation. I don't suggest for a moment that you have no talent as a mannequin: on the contrary I think you probably have a very real talent, but to me it's significant that you should choose that particular profession—one in which you don't have to train for months, don't have to work your way slowly towards the top . . . one in which you receive the limelight immediately . . ."

"And do you honestly think we don't work?" she had cried. "Have you any idea what it's like to stand on your feet for four hours in a cold *atelier* while two men who treat you like furniture argue about a tuck in a dress which you wear like Cinderella; because you'll never have the money to buy it yourself? Do you realise the rehearsals, the swollen ankles and the hours of overtime which go into the making of even a small fashion show?"

"I've certainly as good an idea as you," he said, "because you haven't even started yet: and that's why I'm willing to bet that you'll be bored with it all within six months. When the novelty has worn off you'll come to the conclusion that the hours of glory aren't enough."

"We'll see," she said. "We'll see."

"No," he answered. "I don't believe you ever will see, not until you're my age at all events, and perhaps *never*, because, for you, the landscape doesn't matter: why should it when you'll always have a mirage dead ahead?"

The buzzer of the house telephone: then Ceferino's voice:

"And what is my little chicken doing?"

"I'm looking at a man selling chestnuts in the street," said Dominique; "since the policeman went away he's sold two bags."

"Indeed? Well, if my little chicken imagines that she's going to sit quietly on her bottom until closing time, she's much mistaken because a wicked man is coming downstairs to stick pins into her."

"Well . . . stop talking: come, then."

"I come . . . alone, and armed," said Ceferino. "You will recognise me by my cloak and the old sabre wound which removed my nose. Incidentally, you might tell that blonde Salome next door to go downstairs, please; Belen is howling for her."

Dominique entered the next-door cubicle. Angéles was asleep, her face hidden by a copy of *Vogue*. She had removed the ear-piece from her telephone, but the instrument as if determined not to be baffled, continued to make weak, clicking sounds.

Dominique roused her.

"Oh God," was all she said. "Up till five o'clock last night, and now this. Who is it?"

It was always easy to amuse oneself with Angéles: people did it all day long. "Two rather dark-complexioned ladies," said Dominique gravely, "Indians, I dare say, because the men with them have what look like diamonds in their turbans."

"Really?" said Angéles. She rose with alacrity, put on her wrap, and was gone: a dancing hem-line and a clatter of high-heeled slippers.

"Now keep still, and don't tell me you're beautiful, because I made the sea-foam that Venus emerged from," said Ceferino, as soon as he had Dominique standing, to his satisfaction, before the three-way mirror. Mumbling, he produced first a tape measure, then a circular piece of chalk. In point of fact he required neither, but their display was, with him, an essential preliminary to work.

"Don't talk," he said. "It disturbs my concentration. If you promise not to talk I'll go on with that story about the Japanese as soon as I've finished."

But Dominique did not want to talk: she was quite content to stare out of the window at the crowds, at the rumour of the busy street. In an hour, in an hour and a half at the most, she would be free. Paco, soon to be waiting patiently with his car beyond the

Métro sign, would drive her to the riding school; or, alternatively, if she preferred, they would have a drink at *Marfil*, not talking much, but holding hands sedately beneath the table.

The explosion will come soon, she thought: even if it is not produced by some brusque loss of temper and all patience upon Desmond's part, or mine, then it is still inevitable, for neither of us now wishes to preserve the reeling structure: on the contrary each is curious to observe the scarred earth, the gaping hole which disintegration will leave for all to witness.

And what will we build, she wondered, when we have made our separate craters?—for, of course, there will be two of them, his and mine. She smiled . . . a smile which Ceferino, busy with her dress, imagined to be the reward of his clowning, but which was, in reality, inspired by the thought of her husband standing, a tragic guide, in uniform, before his private bomb crater: because Desmond would surely put a fence around the site, and charge a small admission for conducted tours; whereas she . . . well, she would not be idle, that was certain. Life for her was just beginning.

Had, indeed, begun, because what had been, for so long, a private clash of wills, with battles fought between four walls, was now, to some extent, a public breach, known to all her friends, to most of his, with skirmishing in open country. It did not need the curious stares of Fife, half compassionate, half quizzical, when he saw that young man in the riding ring, nor the too bright chatter of Freddy Cherr, encountered in the street, nor even the whispers and sidelong glances to which she was subjected in bars and clubs, to inform Dominique that she was the topic of many conversations; though she sometimes wondered what such people said to Desmond. Very probably, she reflected, they said nothing at all: was there not some convention that husbands were the last to be informed?

Not, of course, that Desmond had ever required detailed intelligence of the decisions forming in her mind: even had that unfortunate encounter in the restaurant never taken place she would have known, by his recent quiescence, by the accumulation and growing obscurity of the allusions which made up his meal-time conversation, that he was watching the march of events, his hand upon the switch which would detonate the final charge . . . or so, no doubt, he liked to think of himself. The new Orsini.

When a man and a woman, both of an effervescent tem-

perament, have loved and lived together for several years, they have already made every matrimonial threat that it is possible for them to make. He had said . . . she had said . . . they had both said, so many times, upon so many trivial pretexts—shouting simultaneously so that the words were no more than a harsh wave of sound, filling the room and causing neighbours to beat on the wall—had said that a communal life was no longer possible, that an intolerable situation must be brought to an end. Now when their marriage was, in fact, dying of inanition, to the accompaniment of no mutual feeling stronger than a dull resentment, the position seemed, to both of them, quite unreal. It was not a question of having cried ‘*Wolf*’ too often: each of them in their turn had *been* the wolf rampaging outside the bolted door; howling for a new and more succulent diet. They had played with the tragedy: now it remained to endure it.

Even their arguments, such as the one which occurred when she informed him that she was about to become a mannequin, were quite sterile because they took place only upon the periphery of questions to which neither had any means of knowing the true answer. What, in fact, would happen if they, whom so many things still held together, now lived apart? It was all very well for him to declare, as he had done so often, that he could then put her out of his mind, forget her, live anew, as one freed of a burden . . . but would this prove to be the case? If so, why then, in their moments of tenderness, of intimacy—moments which continued to exist, which were more poignant, warmer perhaps, now, beneath the threat of calamity—why then did she see tears in his eyes and feel the sharp prick of tears in her own . . . and why did it seem to her unthinkable that their two lives should be sundered utterly apart, that he should live with other women, and she herself with other men?

To these questions Dominique did not attempt to formulate an answer; but in moments such as now, when enforced immobility permitted self-analysis, and thought, for once, was not a stream of spattered fragments but consecutive, she was inclined to believe that not only time, but also acceptance, become with time habit upon her husband’s part, would be, with the grey hairs and rheumatics of a communal old age, their end of it. The child—their child—had become for her a symbol, an assurance that the road to reconciliation would be always open.

"You never," he had once said to her, "you never see the boomerang on its way back until it hits you. You don't even feel the blow until some time after you've received it. Your imagination operates at two extremities, two only: the thorough redecoration to your own advantage of the distant past, and the supply of guilt and gold-leaf for a nebulous but splendid future."

"Surely that is better than you," she had answered. "You are like the coward in your Shakespeare—and not with death alone, for you suffer every little setback a thousand times before, by your inertia and your constant talk about them, you make disasters quite inevitable."

In private thought, Dominique showed, towards Thornton, a degree of tolerance; and towards herself, a degree of severity which would have surprised him had he been privy to the deeper, the more constant eddies of her mind. Occasionally, some tiny disturbance, a brief upswirl of the prevailing current, appeared upon the surface, as when, one day, with lipstick poised, before the bathroom mirror, she said:

"No, we never had much chance . . . we never did. There were so many things against us even when we started."

Those things: Dominique could have enumerated them, pit-a-pat, like Angéles with the disabilities of her sex, within ten seconds, on the fingers of her hand. First of all, and most important of all, worth the thickness of two thumbs upon her hand by comparison with any other problem, there had been the war . . . the hateful, stupid and vainglorious war which, beyond all doubt, like some recurrent illness which returns at intervals in feverish bouts, had, by an accumulative action, warped his character, employing as auxiliary for this purpose a virus which he would carry with him to the grave, and which surely had become not less, but more, potent in his blood as time passed: the omnipresent influence, the sick-sweet memory of his dead first wife.

Thoughtful in such matters—she also kept a scrapbook into which she pasted news-cuttings of events in which they had participated—Dominique maintained a ponderous family photograph album. Here, higgledy-piggledy fashion, for she had decided upon an impulse to start it, and the work of classification would have involved days, perhaps even weeks, of sticky fingers—here, all haphazard, with baby Desmond glaring fixedly across a page at baby Geneviève, and Dominique herself in First Com-

munion clothes insisting upon favourable comparison with Barbara in a two-piece bathing dress . . . here was the record of over thirty years in two human destinies, and in that of their fleshly issue.

Sometimes, when she found the enigma of her husband's character particularly baffling, Dominique would fetch this album and study, through a magnifying glass, pictures of his face in early youth and adolescence. The features, she would say to herself . . . the features may change, may coarsen, or become more refined, may even undergo what appear to be structural modifications: but the expressions, the smiles, the frowns and the grimaces; surely these are constant from the cradle to the coffin?

And, indeed, in those early photographs of her husband she identified many facial attitudes with which she was familiar, but with this essential difference: that within the covers of the book one could find the earnest frown, the too impudent grin on every page, in every second of the early photographs, whereas to-day, compared even with the date of their first meeting, how rarely they were seen, how fleeting their duration, how rapid the return to the wooden rigidity that she knew so well . . . "*It's not a poker but a beggar-my-neighbour face you have,*" she had once told him.

"Am I hurting you?" said Ceferino suddenly.

Dominique looked down. "No," she said, "but is there any need for you to palp my thigh like that?"

Ceferino grinned. "I promise you that your thigh arouses in me about as many lascivious thoughts as would its equivalent in dead mutton," he said. "In fact, rather fewer, for one must hope that the mutton would be less encased in fat. I repeat it is your urgent duty to lose three kilos before the show next week, young lady."

Ceferino had risen: now he sank down again, proceeded with his work, and Dominique, gazing at his bald and gleaming head, resumed her shuttle-train of thought, shunting certain wagons, as it were, into sidings, for inspection later, but flinging open others, of which the labels proclaimed them part of the convoy now undergoing scrutiny.

What had *happened* to him, she asked herself: when and for what reason had the driving impulse within him faltered? At twenty years of age he had, she knew, shown unusual energy, had

earned what were, for those times and for his years, a considerable amount of money, yet at some point during the detested war, or not long after it, he had, by his own admission, changed, or at least been obliged to take morose note of a change, perhaps gradual, in himself. Could it be that the stock phrases which one found in books were not mere saws, but veracious, because based upon countless centuries of tribal fact . . . could it be that men were, indeed, as if forged from different metals, with higher or lower points of torsion, higher or lower melting points?

Dominique did not know, did not pretend to know: furthermore she was handicapped in her search for an explanation—much as men in public life find their field for political manoeuvre entrammelled by the requirements of protocol, or party dogma—by an assumption to which she had long given credence, as to an article of faith: namely, that all Thornton's errors, the entire panorama of his character which resulted from it, were the direct result of the noxious influence of her predecessor.

In secret conclave with herself, as now, however, she knew that this could not be true, or was, at most, no more than partially the truth. Herself inclined to melancholy, swift towards discouragement, mercurial only in her impulses, Dominique understood whole sectors of her husband's character very well; the more so did it deject her to realise, therefore, that her knowledge of him was, in fact, no more extensive than would have been that of some pedantic meteorologist stationed by dull duty in a picturesque stretch of coast; provided with a tide time-table which stated to the day and even to the minute when the floods and neaps were due, and previously put in possession of several years' statistical information concerning the prevailing winds.

The wind blew sharp, with northerly bite: then soft and dulcet, containing advance intimation of tears, from the south-west. Against all the laws of nature, neap tides followed the flood tides within twenty-four hours, in the most unorthodox manner; but nobody, when the appointment had been proffered, had mentioned the frequency of earthquakes . . . nobody had explained that the ordnance maps in one's possession might be obsolete, and nobody had indicated the presence of quicksands upon beaches where one had hoped to take health-giving walks.

This man, thought Dominique, this Desmond who asked me in marriage while sitting on a cactus bush from which he refused to

get up upon the pretext that, having begun his declaration, he must continue it in the attitude in which fate, by a backward demotion, had placed him. . . .

This Desmond who . . . the gulp in her throat was all her own, but the tear was half self-pity, and half pity for the whole pitiful world.

"Why are you crying?" said Ceferino. "Are there not tears shed enough on this earth, on this stretch of pavement, even?"

"I never cry."

"Is that so? Then I suggest you see an oculist, as well as a weight-lifter."

Ceferino stood up, put away his chattels, wiped his coat clean of chalk, produced a blue cotton handkerchief, blew his nose; then sat down in the divan.

"I hope you noticed the way I moved over here," he said. "With gun dogs they call it instinct. With bald fashion-cutters our agility is put down to experience." He placed a hand on her knee; she felt the damp of it instantly. "I have finished my work," he said. "As a matter of fact, for the last ten minutes I wasn't working at all: I was watching your face. You may not have noticed it but there are indentations on this sofa which fit the shape of my buttocks. This means that, having listened to dozens, I can listen also to you . . . and, believe me, you won't be wasting your time. Women have only two stories: one is called Cinderella, the other Snow White. It is true that there is a variation called Little Boy Blue . . ."

"Do go away, Ceferino," said Dominique. "Can't you see I'm in no mood for jokes?"

"You haven't got your manner balanced yet," replied Ceferino. "Personally, I always hold that girls should take into account the aura of mythomania which they leave behind them, when they leave the room. Now talk, please: I'm listening. What I have said so far is a very poor guide to my character."

"I want you to go away," she said passionately. "Why did you have to break in and interrupt like that? I want to be alone . . ."

"That's a stupid thing to say," said Ceferino. "They should bring some schoolroom desks into these cubicles and let the girls cut hearts pierced with arrows in the wood."

He patted her knee again. "Perhaps you'd like me to finish that story about the Japanese?"

"No."

He looked at her. Ah, the crime of it, the crime of it, he thought, why must they always hurt themselves, then lash about with hurt for others?

"I suppose you realise," he said, "that a young man has just parked a car across the street."

"Yes, I've seen him."

"Well, just imagine I'm a priest. If my mother had had her way I would have been one. Perhaps a Jesuit, too: my mind is very subtle."

"Ceferino," said Dominique. "If I ask you something do you promise not to laugh at me?"

"Certainly not: I might laugh behind your back; then I should feel guilty. But if it's any help, I can promise not to *speak* a word."

"Very well," she said, hesitated, then came to a decision. "What would happen if I took my child and went to live alone?"

"That is not a question, but an affirmation. You are, in fact, about to do so. Your dressing-table is littered with the cards of house agents."

"Answer me all the same," said Dominique.

"I'll answer you with another question." Ceferino nodded in the direction of the window. "What does that young man say about it?"

"Stop calling him a young man: he's thirty-three."

"I dare say—but the child invariably lives on somewhere in all of us—below the belt in most cases, but with him, I imagine, in the head." He grinned at her but not maliciously. "Would you like me to tell you what he said? I think I can put it word for word: he said that his heart yearned for you to take one particular road but that his sense of honour impelled him to remind you of another harder path, the one of duty."

"How stupid you are."

"Did he not say exactly this?"

"Not in such flowery language, anyway." Dominique blew her nose. "Besides, leave Paco out of it. His existence is merely a pleasant accident. I've no intention at all of throwing myself away upon the first man who . . . who . . ."

"Who crosses your path is, I think, the expression," said Ceferino sedately. "We seem to be much concerned with roads

and footpaths, don't we . . . perhaps this is because we are no longer attracted to the straight and narrow one?"

* * * *

Little by little, and because he liked and wished to help her—because, too, he knew well how to coax a timid, cringing conscience into ever bolder leaps across chasms of retrospective modesty—Ceferino did indeed persuade Dominique to speak to him almost in the form of narrative; and if, later, he was to reflect that, while fashions in art might come and go, women would always remain loyal to a single style—that of impressionism—then this would not be because Ceferino considered that women were deceivers, midwives to untruth . . . for what need had they of lies, evasion, when their genius lay in condensation, in the careful edition of selected fact?

And as she spoke, he watched her lips, her eyes. This fat and rather vulgar little man knew well that speech is but sound and air, that truth is more evident in the down droop of a mouth, in an eyelid's twitch, in the sudden inward pinching of extended nostrils than in the spoken word.

"When we were first married," she began, "the future seemed to hold such promise, so much hope . . ."

And Ceferino listened. He took careful note of each phrase, and as he listened he translated for himself, extemporaneously, for within these words of every day the essence of her bitter canticle was very different; more humble, and more loving: "Oh you . . . you," her eyes and mouth and body said: "Can you not give me my freedom; do you not realise that you no longer carry me, that now I carry you, my unwilling, grumbling burden? At first you taught me; now I teach you, but you do not pay attention to your lessons! Oh yes, you taught me—long ago you began, and with enthusiasm, with so much enthusiasm that you were for many months a boy again, patient with me when I could not understand, gentle with me when I could not see the symbols which you held before me . . ."

"And you have definitely agreed to part?" asked Ceferino.

"Yes, in principle. We spoke of it last night, but, I don't know why, I have the impression . . . oh, not that he wants to keep me, but that he requires a delay before the separation actually takes place. He needs, I believe, to be able to maintain later that it was he who said . . . 'Go': not I that I was going."

"In the circumstances," said Ceferino, "that is very natural. There are always two versions of this kind of story: the real one, and the other, much more piquant, which the general public favours. Your chief concern, however, is not with what people say but in the nine or ten clauses which, typed upon a piece of paper with a pretty watermark, make up a Spanish legal separation. You may not know it, but, unless a wife has permission from her husband, she cannot undertake even a short railway journey in this country, let alone possess a bank account or certain other small personal liberties to which even savages are nowadays entitled."

"Oh, we have seen to that," she said. "He came quite willingly with me to a lawyer this afternoon. He signed that paper, and agreed to support our daughter."

"He did that? Then what are you worrying about, my nervous little chicken? Your husband has behaved honourably, even, one would say, with dignity."

"Yes, exactly, with dignity. But you don't know my husband. He is quite a little man, really, in every sense, in spite of his respect for ceremony and polite usage. Louis XIV was a little man, too: when a caricaturist removed his wig and his high heels, he looked very small indeed; just like a dwarf. That is the way Desmond looks when they take his pride away."

"Let us hope not literally," said Ceferino. Later, he rebuked himself for having made this remark.

"Oh, Desmond . . . Desmond . . . I made him say that. Darling, I'm sorry . . . I'm down on my knees: I admit it isn't true. Oh, let them all talk; oh, let them all talk: these stupid little people with their blister-deep feelings."

"I'm sorry. I made an unfortunate remark," said Ceferino.

"Did you hear, Desmond: he said that his remark was unfortunate? I shall go on talking. I'm very good at saying one thing and thinking another, but this is really my shining hour . . . oh yes, it is . . . it is. Desmond, I'm telling him about Gloria now. I'm telling him that, when I first met you, you were like a river in spate; heavy timber in the current in the middle, and fat, swollen cattle in the slack water by the banks where the frightened peasantry were engaged in building impromptu defences . . ."

"He also said," she continued, "that he had written to my father."

"Ah?" said Ceferino, "and why did he do that?"

"He told me that, if we were to part, he refused all responsibility for my future actions, and would consider it his duty to inform my family."

"Yes, you said that, and I know why, Desmond . . . always, always you feel impelled to precipitate events. You dilly-dally . . . dilly-dally . . . then you take refuge in the outrageous: you'll be so smug when father comes, so smug: the injured, but still understanding, husband."

"It's all so stupid, really," she said. "After all, I want only to live my own life. What is wrong with that?"

"Nothing in itself," said Ceferino. "Except that, just as nature abhors a vacuum, so do men the spectacle of solitary women."

"Ah, Desmond . . . Desmond . . . you don't, you never did, treat marriage as a living thing, but like a history with dates, and yourself the despot writing it, emphasising every line with the glare of a mad eye or the blow of fists upon a table. Is it wrong to dream? I loved you. The first two years were so delightful . . ."

"The first two years were wonderful," she said.

"Then that is more than one can say for the first six months of separation," said Ceferino. "They are invariably the worst." He tapped her knee. "This town is large," he said, "but it is also small. One knows everything that happens in it, and I do not refer to your romance now, but to another which runs parallel to it."

"Yes?"

"The father of that young man out there is most anxious for him to marry a certain young woman."

"Yes. I know that. I have seen her at the riding school."

"Then perhaps you know also that the father is a hard and a self-righteous man. When obstacles are placed upon his path, he does not jump them: he kicks them until they either yield or break. He can cause much trouble for you."

"I've already told you," said Dominique, "that I have no commitments towards that young man."

"In that case," said Ceferino, "since you refuse to talk frankly, I have no option but to go on with the story of the Japanese."

Dominique looked at him for a moment, then plunged again into her inner world:

"Can we not be friends, Desmond? Do you know no other sentiments but the two extremes of love and hate? I don't want to

lose you absolutely: you are the father of my child, and there is all the past: we could have lived upon our past, as they say squirrels do, on their supply of nuts, in winter. Must it all be definite and irrevocable? What do I care whether you murdered that man you thought to be my lover? I don't possess your sense of doom . . ."

"The Japanese," Ceferino said, "proved to be surprisingly energetic; even, one might say, insatiable, though hearsay is, of course, unreliable because men so often exaggerate their powers in this respect. The girl was at first pleasantly surprised, but, as time passed, she came to the conclusion that, although things might be ordered very differently in Asia, her client was making demands upon her which, in Barcelona, must be considered as excessive . . . especially when she took into account the sum involved, which was no more than fifty pesetas."

Dominique was scarcely listening. The notice said 'a house to let': she wandered for the last time through the empty rooms.

"We were poor, but I did not mind. Do you remember the night when Geneviève was born?—it cost us the last of our housekeeping money to go into Toulon in the taxi. I haven't forgotten how you put your head on my stomach saying that, by doing this, you would surely be able to take a little bit of the pain away. Our love is brown and bruised now, like an apple fallen from a tree in a wild gale, but if you had wished we could have cut off those hurt and uneatable parts of the apple: there was never any worm in the core."

"From time to time," said Ceferino, "the Japanese would rise, and perform, in the centre of the hotel bedroom, certain gymnastic exercises of an unorthodox nature. Press-ups, indeed, and a certain amount of conventional arm-waving began the display, but subsequently he would dive under the bed, emerging upon the other side; confronting the cringing girl with a shining and triumphant face. Then he would get into the bed again and, as I say, between those rumpled sheets, he proved extortionate."

"Yes," said Dominique, for it was time to leave the house: "go on: what happened?"

"Surely you must know by this time," said Ceferino, "that a man telling this kind of story should never be hurried?"

"I want to know what happened."

"My dear girl, what do you think happened? Women are by nature inquisitive. When our yellow friend had risen for the

eighth time to perform his physical jerks, the exhausted girl became alarmed. 'No,' she thought, 'I can endure no more of this'. She endeavoured to rise in her turn, but, alas, her strength was insufficient for her purpose. Her head fell forward; her chin found support upon the mattress: her eyes confronted a puce expanse of dusty carpet beneath the bed."

"Yes?" said Dominique.

"She saw not only carpet: there were also seven other Japanese lying peacefully, close as sardines, beneath that bed."

Dominique was silent for a moment. Then: "But why *seven*?" she said.

"I thought you'd ask that," said Ceferino. "Don't you understand? The happy one, the first, was visible, and could be seen by anyone: but the others not. I consider this a moral tale, really."

Oh Desmond, you who talk to everybody . . . would you say that I do, too . . . I mean, talk too much to everybody? Shall I be as unhappy as you are when I'm thirty? You came into a corridor once, then called me there, then gave me a ring.

"I am a fool," said Ceferino suddenly.

"Why do you say that?"

"Never mind why: I say it. One is always a fool to imagine one can help people."

"I call that a very stupid story," said Dominique.

"Yes," said Ceferino. "So, no doubt, did the last Japanese."

Eight

DON ESTEBAN GALLANGOS SHUFFLED PAPERS, stretched his legs beneath the table, his toes searching for the footstool. From the other side of the table Barry observed the movement of the Governor's legs in their attempt to regain contact with the absent prop. The spectacle was diverting; above the table line, Don Esteban was a dignified, truncated figure, engaged in polite conversation: beneath it he was represented by two black cylinders poking cautiously this way and that.

Barry rose. He knelt, placed the footstool in the requisite position.

"Thank you," said Don Esteban without embarrassment. He continued to shuffle papers.

His difficulty, here, was that, although he displayed considerable manipulative skill, the papers were inevitably of different qualities, and even thicknesses; in consequence of which the more flimsy among them were inclined to escape from the parent body, or to become crumpled. When this happened, Don Esteban would pause, utter a sound which could be rendered phonetically as "*Tchuk . . . tchuk*", and then begin again. Barry watched him with interest, observing which:

"It is a nervous habit, retained no doubt from my days in the lecture hall," he said. "Perhaps you, too, have nervous habits?"

"I have been told that I snore . . . though not, of course, recently," said Barry. He pointed to the papers. "Excuse me," he continued, "but are they not in some special order . . . surely you disturb the sequence if you continually switch them about?"

Don Esteban smiled. "To you, I will confess," he said. "They are old letters, of no importance at all. They impress the stupid and when I am in the presence of intelligent men such as you, Señor Keating, they provide employment for my hands, which are otherwise inclined to flutter." He put aside the letters. "Señor Aranjuez is here," he said.

"Yes, so I had imagined."

"At present he is elsewhere in the building, but he will join us soon. He is a very busy man, you know."

"Oh, I'm sure he is."

"For my part," said Don Esteban affably, "I am very glad to have this opportunity of a little chat with you. I would have done so many times before had it not been for the regulations." He sighed profoundly. "Ah, the regulations . . . do you know, my dear sir, that there are as many regulations in this building as there are prisoners: that is to say, rather more than a thousand?"

"They must be very difficult to learn by heart."

"Oh, I have a little book . . . I have a little book. Would you care for me to lend you a copy? You must be short of reading matter".

"I should be delighted."

Don Esteban examined Barry with evident approbation: "I am envious of you, Señor Keating. You are both cultured and adventurous. You put me in mind of your celebrated country-

man, Drake . . . the one who singed the beard of our greatest King. By the way, where is your own beard?"

"I became tired of it."

Don Esteban nodded. "Exactly," he said. "You grew a beard: you come to dislike it: you shaved it off. Now, if I grew a beard, I should be obliged to retain it in order to escape the ridicule of my colleagues. Of the two of us, Señor Keating, it is you, not I, who are the freer man."

"I'm very glad to hear you say so."

"I hope you do not find my prattling offensive to your feelings, Señor Keating?"

"Not at all."

"Then tell me . . ." Don Esteban leant forward: his manner became conspiratorial. "Your case being political, I am not allowed to see your dossier. Is it really true that you once deserted from the British Army?"

"I did sever my connection with that organisation."

"And that you have spent the last six or seven years in—how shall I put it—armed commerce in the Western Mediterranean?"

"I think that's a most elegant way of putting it," said Barry. He was wondering whether the Governor could possibly be as ingenuous as he sounded, or whether the man had been ordered to ask these questions in the hope of extracting information.

Don Esteban, however, was either a very good actor or else quite genuinely enthusiastic: "Remarkable!" he said now, clapping his hands together, "remarkable . . . but explain to me one thing, Señor Keating: why do you restrict your activities to this old and time-worn inland sea? Does not travel tempt you . . . do you not find Mexico, Peru, Tahiti, magic names? In your place, with your freedom from all ties, I would have bought my steamship ticket long ago."

"You must look at these things from a professional point of view," replied Barry. "One place is much like another these days. When I was a child there were still delightful revolutions every month in South America. Now they are very rare: the frigidaire and television are killing them. There are one or two interminable wars in Asia, of course, but they all seem to have a Marxist background. I'm afraid that I don't care very much whether hungry Chinese get their daily bowl of rice or not. Besides, there is no money in it."

"And you consider money essential?"

"Not in itself, perhaps . . . but as the reward in a game of chance; yes, certainly. One must always play for something. If you don't believe me, look at card games: poker is deadly dull unless there's cash stacked up on each corner of the table."

"One could perhaps play for one's peace of mind?" suggested Don Esteban, "for one's satisfaction with a task well done? You, for instance, are at the summit of your profession. Does it not please you to think that some people fear you, that others envy you, that still others must obey your orders?"

"I'm afraid not. It might if I had invented smuggling, but as I didn't, I can't see any particular merit in my activities . . . much as I would like to."

The Governor smiled: "You are in fact a frustrated romantic?" he suggested.

"Perhaps . . . but then who is not, my dear Governor? The trouble is: the world's too old. It's all been done before and, most often, better. Your ancestors were the lucky ones. Give me my choice between inventing penicillin and being the first white man to set eyes on the Pacific, and I'll take Cortez every time."

"It is curious that you should mention ancestors," said the Governor, "for one of mine receives three lines in almost every history book. To-day you see before you the last of the family, a professor in charge of a penitentiary, but four hundred years ago a Gallangos tried to found an Elysium six thousand miles away, in the Pacific."

"Is that so?" Barry was interested less by the fact itself than in the enthusiasm with which the Governor described it.

"Yes, my dear sir. The island of Espiritu Santo in what is now the New Hebrides was discovered by a man who bore my name."

"And colonised by him?"

"Alas, no . . . or rather, only temporarily. He, too, must have been a frustrated romantic, which is interesting because one would have thought that a voyage so long and arduous would have satisfied the most exigent of men. My ancestor, however, had scarcely landed before he began to build a town, scarcely built this town before all the houses collapsed—their foundations having been devoured by ants—and had scarcely begun to clear away the ruins when he was himself set upon and devoured, together with most of his crew, by vicious savages."

"It is a sad story."

"As to that I am not so sure," said Don Esteban. "Personally, I am opposed to cannibalism, but the sentiments of my ancestor may have been different. They were certainly more complex. Consider his mentality . . . the name he gave the island, for example. There can be no doubt that the poor man actually believed in the existence of the Holy Ghost, as I, may I be forgiven if I err, no longer do. Holding such a belief my ancestor may have viewed the preparations for the ghastly meal—the bubbling pot, the chanting Kanakas, the skewered limbs of his companions—almost with equanimity. After all, he had but to say a few prayers and, when the news of his death reached Rome, he could be pretty certain that he would be beatified . . . perhaps even commemorated as a saint and martyr if the Holy Office cared to overlook a few small irregularities committed by him while in Darien. These old *Conquistadores* possessed a form of moral penicillin, to help them in adversity. Tell me . . . would not you yourself, Señor Keating, face death calmly if you thought you might be called Saint Barry, with your name, each year, upon a calendar?"

Barry laughed: "I'm afraid I think that most unlikely." He stroked his nose, as he always did when amused. "You are confusing romanticism with idealism," he said. "Surely nobody wants to be put in a pot?"

"Possibly you are right," sighed Don Esteban. He began to fiddle with his papers again. "I agree, too, that, in some ways, humanity may have advanced . . . but at what a frightful cost, Señor Keating! Where is life's pageantry, where are the galleons heavy with bullion which sailed from the Main?"

"I very much fear," said Barry, "that they are heavy with marijuana and contraband cigarettes."

"Exactly," said Don Esteban. "Could anything more exactly illustrate our decadence? I do not pretend to be a man of talent . . . I am not conceited . . . but it does seem to me that I deserved better than to pass my life in lecture halls and in the administrative office of a prison, the fine upsurge of my youthful enthusiasm dissipated, first in explanation of men too long deceased; now in the direction of men too long detained."

Barry grinned. "As one who falls within that second category, my dear Governor, you will perhaps allow me to say that you

should count your blessings, not complain. I have now spent two months in solitary confinement. It is an experience to which I'd like to see everybody subjected . . . in place of military service, for example. One becomes so bored with one's own company, *so* tired of one's life-story, that one understands at last just how boring one must be to other people."

"Don't speak to me of such things," said Don Esteban in an anguished voice. He did, indeed, appear to be much moved. "I am not made of stone. At night I sit here at this desk. The whole building is silent. I hear no sound except the tramp of sentries' feet. I *hear* no sound, but I *feel* the pulsing of a thousand souls. Sometimes the sensation becomes so intense that I can no longer bear it: I open a window—but that is worse: at once I am assailed by the philharmonic telepathy, the prayers and objurgations of a thousand wives and mothers separated from their men. I assure you, sir, that a gaoler's lot is not an easy one."

"Well; that is certainly some small consolation," said Barry amiably.

"The other day," said Don Esteban, "the other day, I received the visit of a deputation from Madrid. They were learned, well-fed men: they had come to make enquiries into prison diet."

"They might well do so," said Barry. "The calorific value of the chick-pea has been overestimated."

"Quite," agreed Don Esteban. "But if you knew the monthly sum which I receive to feed you all, you would lay the blame elsewhere. However, that is not the point: do you know why this commission came here . . . no? They came, my dear sir, because there has recently been a severe outbreak of scurvy in this prison . . . of *scurvy*, do you hear me? . . . yes, here, in Seville, a town in which there are perhaps more oranges than in any other city of the world." Don Esteban shuffled papers feverishly. "But I . . . I, the Governor, am forbidden to serve oranges. The ban upon oranges is duly recorded in our standing orders."

"And so the chick-pea and it's friend, the bean, stand in lonely glory?"

"Do not joke, Señor Keating . . . for then I feel that it is I whom you mock. I do my best: that I promise you. In your case, I think I can prove that I am well disposed towards you. A few weeks ago you wrote a letter . . ."

"Yes?" said Barry. Suddenly he seemed to be alert, even tense.

"I have the reply for you here," said Don Esteban. He took an envelope from a drawer, passed it across the desk; then, as Barry prepared to open it, he waved a hand in negation: "No . . . not here. Read it in your cell. Your friend is coming. I trust you will forgive me for having read the correspondence but that is a matter in which I have no choice."

"I am very grateful to you," said Barry.

"Then please, on no account whatever, mention this affair to Señor Aranjuez . . . you understand?"

"Oh, perfectly."

"I have theoretical powers only, you see, in so far as you are concerned. In practice I should submit this application for an interview to Aranjuez. But we don't want that, do we?"

"No, we most certainly don't."

"It will be our little secret, then?"

"You bet it will," said Barry. He had placed the letter in an inside pocket of his coat, but, in spite of the Governor's injunction, he could not restrain himself from fingering the envelope.

Perceiving this, Don Esteban beamed, adding: "He is coming to-morrow, I believe."

"Ah?" Again Barry seemed tense. "Forgive me," he said. "One loses count of time. What is the date to-day?"

"The twenty-ninth."

"That will do very nicely."

Don Esteban looked at him in some surprise, but since Barry said nothing further, the Governor was obliged to talk of other things.

A few minutes later Aranjuez entered the room. After some preliminary civilities, designed to cover the discreet withdrawal of Don Esteban, he proceeded to the point at issue:

"Well, my friend, have you arrived at your decision?"

"I should like a little more time to think it over."

"Why? Is not a month sufficient?"

"Not really," said Barry; his manner frank, disarming, engaging. "You see, at first I was absolutely against the idea, but this last week or so I've been gradually coming round to it."

"Gradually deciding that you'd try to pull some inferior wool over my eyes you mean, don't you?" said Aranjuez. He sighed; loose paper danced upon the desk. "One of the great drawbacks of this profession," he said, "one of the reasons we all suffer from

high arterial tension, is that everybody tries to be so *clever*. Come now, Keating, tell the truth: have you been thinking that you might be able to buy yourself out of here, for example?"

"You flatter me," said Barry; "it probably costs less to keep the Woolworth heiress quiet than a well-placed Spanish civil servant."

"Yes," said Aranjuez, "the Ministry of the Interior is expensive. It is perhaps fortunate for your bank balance that you have no contact there . . . and just as well, too, for if you did possess one you might be able to have me over-ruled. Corporate States are strangely incorporate in practice. This is because, the loaf being in a single pair of hands, we others must scramble on the floor for the rare crumbs of power."

"May I have one of the Governor's cigarettes?" said Barry. He pointed to the table.

"Please take the boxful," said Aranjuez. "Forgive my thoughtlessness." He examined Barry amiably. "You're looking well," he said. "How are you getting on with that girl you spoke to me about—the one upon the balcony?"

Barry blew a cloud of cigarette smoke. He watched the cloud hover, and begin to rise; then he swung his open hand through it, dispersing smoke in all directions.

"Well, I suppose we all enjoy the cinema," said Aranjuez. "Who is it that you're imitating?"

"The Man in the Iron Mask," said Barry. He looked at Aranjuez reflectively. "How much would you pay me?"

"You are prepared to talk business?"

"I'm prepared to listen to you."

A strange expression appeared for a moment on the Spaniard's face. It was less an expression, perhaps, than a decontraction of the maxillary muscles.

"I think it may be said that we pay Union rates," he said. "There are also, of course, various ways of making money on the side, many of which are no doubt familiar to you. We always like to feel that our operatives are happy, satisfied men."

"You make it sound like the Salvation Army," said Barry. "I suppose you'll be telling me next you have a pension scheme as well . . . for people who live long enough?" He stared at his opponent's hands. The hands were large and hairless, the fingers long. "Where did you think of sending me?" he said.

"To Paris and Marseille . . . and other places," said Aranjuez.

"That means Islam," said Barry.

"Exactly."

"I don't know why you can't leave the sons of the desert in peace," said Barry. "Supposing you do stir up trouble for the French in Morocco, what good does it do you?"

"It is not a question of good, but of foreign policy," said Aranjuez. "A nation must have a foreign policy in much the same way that ambitious men who wish the world to take note of them must have large cars and attractive mistresses. Albania and the Yémen—to take two impoverished examples—have no foreign policy, except a feeling of resentment against powerful and predatory neighbours. We Spanish, also, have been long in the wilderness. Now, with the American dollars behind us, we wish to make our voice heard in the world."

"You don't need to talk to me like an editorial from *Arriba*," said Barry, referring to the most prominent Falangist newspaper in Spain. "Shall we leave the international scene for a moment? Why is it you want me, personally, so much?"

"You wish me to be frank?" said Aranjuez.

"I see you intend to be."

"Very well. You appear to me to possess many of the qualities, and none of the defects, of your unfortunate but enthusiastic compatriot, Guy Fawkes. I need an Englishman, for certain work I have in hand."

Barry was silent for a moment. Then: "There's something about all this I don't understand," he said. "If you let me loose in France, how d'you know I won't skip?"

Aranjuez shrugged: "That is a risk which one takes."

"Do you consider me such valuable property that you're prepared to take such risks?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"For several reasons . . . your nationality, for example; your nautical ability, your knowledge of Morocco: all these are interesting factors."

"Ah?" said Barry. Then: "I think I begin to see daylight."

"That is always most gratifying," said Aranjuez; "tell me something of the daylight which you see."

"I see this: I possess a boat. If you released me I could pretend

to be doing what I had always done . . . smuggling . . . but in reality I might be engaged upon something very different, something under your auspices."

"Such as . . .?"

"You mentioned Morocco a moment ago. There are a lot of people in Morocco, and some of them are not altogether happy with the régime under which they live . . ."

"That is perhaps so." Aranjuez smiled thinly.

"The present head of your State," continued Barry, "who is well known as the friend of the Arab world, is perturbed by this lamentable state of affairs. He is particularly distressed at the thought that many admirable men have been driven into exile, separated from their wives and children by the tyrannical French. He would like to see some of these people return to their native land, to their homes and hearths, to the little printing presses which at present are rusting, to the cartons of gelignite which lie hidden in caves or buried beneath the hot desert sand."

"You grow almost lyrical," commented Aranjuez.

"It is a lyrical subject," said Barry. "Most poetic. Besides, I approve of anybody who would want to leave Cairo and return to Casablanca."

"These interesting individuals you speak of are not all in Cairo," said Aranjuez. "That's the trouble."

"How do you mean?"

Aranjuez looked beyond Barry's head, at the nailed feet of the Christ on the wall. "You British have always been so pre-occupied with seizing large blocks of fertile and strategically interesting territory that you tend to ignore the colonial crumbs which other races have been able to annex," he said. "You possess, I agree, the tin mines and the cocoa plantations, but the French are remarkably well equipped with climatic health resorts, some of them as far from civilisation as Timbuctoo and Adrar. Nor do the French need to despatch potential Napoleons to Saint Helena: a string of small islands along the African coast fulfil that requirement."

"I see," said Barry. "But, why do you propose to send me to Paris and Marseille . . . couldn't I do your work, whatever it is, equally well from Tangiers?"

"You could not," said Aranjuez. "Timbuctoo is, no doubt, charming, but Paris is generally considered more convenient."

That is why the more tractable of the gentlemen we are discussing are often assigned to forced residence within the confines of Metropolitan France." You will find some of them living very comfortably in apartments overlooking the quays of the capital. Others remember their past glories in spas first made fashionable by the Second Empire. If you agree to my proposition you will visit several such places: you will meet many French politicians, and you will cease entirely to believe that Robespierre, who was a politician, too, could ever have been incorruptible."

"That's all very well," said Barry, "but what about a passport? The French may be venal: they're very far from stupid."

"I have rather more than nine hundred British and Commonwealth passports of various types in Madrid," said Aranjuez. "I have also a London telephone directory which you may consult if you are at a loss for a name, and if you will take my advice I recommend a Scottish patronymic. The Scottish race is known, in France, to be intelligent, whimsical, and much concerned with the figures which represent service percentage upon hotel bills; that is to say, as serious people."

"I'll be a Papuan if you pay me enough," said Barry. "How much will you pay me, incidentally?"

"Three thousand dollars a month."

"Are you joking?"

"No, I am perfectly serious. It is our habit to give salaries but not expenses: we find this makes for greater honesty, and a saving in clerical staff. At present, you may consider that the sum is large, but don't forget that you will have to travel, entertain and run your boat on it."

"In that case I need at least four thousand," said Barry. He lowered his eyes demurely. "Think of all those poor sailors, the sole support of their families," he said.

"Most of your poor sailors have affiliation or maintenance orders out against them in their countries of origin," said Aranjuez. "I also happen to know, to within two decimals, what you made during your last working month, and it is considerably less than the sum which I am offering you."

"But consider the loss of independence," said Barry. "Think of what Bolivar said to the Indians in revolt . . ."

"What did Bolivar say to these Indians?"

"I forget now. But it was very stirring . . . something about

chickens not calling choppers lethal instruments." He gave Aranjuez a careful, a searching glance. "So I keep the boat, do I?"

"Oh yes. That is essential. But, of course, you don't keep it in Tangiers any more, and from the moment of your engagement with me you cease to carry arms and drugs. That must be clearly understood."

"You're taking the caviare out of my mouth," said Barry. "Would you mind telling me where you do intend to base me, then?"

"In the Columbretes islands, between Tarragona and Ibiza."

"But that's a desert, man: with crayfish as inhabitants."

"Precisely," said Aranjuez.

"Well, I am interested in this idea," said Barry, "but only academically as yet. I need the four thousand. I shall need a new skipper, too, if you're going to have me running round France half the time."

"Very well: four thousand," said Aranjuez. Then he paused and, as if capitulating to a further thought, added: "But what will you do with it . . . what *do* you do with all your money?"

"I don't know," said Barry. "I buy things . . . gadgets, women, apartments and so on. It is the acquisition of money which I find interesting, not its possession. I have often thought that God should make all commercially or intellectually successful men a standard two metres in height. It would save so much argument, and so many flexed muscles if we could recognise our superiors instantly."

Aranjuez laughed. "You remind me of one of your compatriots," he said. "This man was an anthropologist. He declared that skulls were harder than consonants; that races lurked behind when languages had slipped away. In you we might say, since your head formation is clearly Alpine, that a Viking lives to-day in Tangiers, while the Saxon lags behind in Norfolk."

But Barry was uninterested in comparative anthropology.

"If I agree," he said, "when will you release me?"

"Immediately."

"And you will allow me to go back to Tangiers?"

"Later . . . first I wish you to come with me to Madrid."

"I see," said Barry slowly.

"I hope you see what I see," said Aranjuez. "There are other

people, you know . . . many other people. However, impressed by your abilities, I would like you to have this chance."

"Don't come with all that nonsense," said Barry. "You have three alternatives: to keep me in prison, to let me go . . . or to make me work for you. In every case the choice is mine."

"There you underestimate me," said Aranjuez. "Most intelligence is routine work. The artist is the man who can impose the routine of his own choice. I propose now to give you an instance of how this is done. You have a friend called Thornton in Barcelona. You wrote to him. He replied. Some days ago one of my men followed this Thornton from his flat to a letter-box. About an hour later some conversation ensued between my man and the postman who had come to clear the box. My man read the letter, which was then replaced in the mails."

"This is very clever," replied Barry composedly. "How do you do it?"

"Just one of the small tricks of the trade."

"Ah yes? And have you any others?"

"Yes, I have one which makes all the difference between a routine administration and a man of genius: it is called a talent for anticipation." Aranjuez leant forward. His voice was hard. "Don't try and play with me, Keating," he said. "It is I who am playing with you. For some time now you have been planning to escape from this prison. For this purpose, although you have no romantic leanings whatever, you have cultivated the acquaintance of a young woman who lives in a house within view of your cell."

"Really? And why should I do that?"

"Because young women are stupid . . . because this one was flattered when you began to send her notes through the agency of your guard, and was still more flattered when she met—oh quite casually—a second admirer in the street. She could not know, of course, that this second man had come over specially from Tangiers in order to make her acquaintance, so that he might exchange signals with you from her balcony." Satisfied with the effect he had produced, Aranjuez lay back in his chair. "Perhaps," he continued, "you would now be so kind as to hand over to me the object which makes such an unsightly bulge in your breast pocket?"

Barry grinned. He laid a fountain-pen upon the table. Aran-

juez opened it. He pressed a button: the fountain-pen became a torch.

"It may interest you to know that I had your friend from Tangiers arrested this morning," he said. "At the present moment he is in a train, between two plain-clothes men, on his way to the boat at Algeciras."

"You certainly seem to believe in regulating my life," said Barry. "Why didn't you hold him?"

Aranjuez ignored the question. "Your intention was to go over the wall, I presume?" he said.

"My dear fellow, naturally. I'm not a miner: can you really see me digging tunnels? Incidentally, I hope you'll take no action against the guard. He was no more in all this than the messenger of love."

"I do not bother myself with subordinates," said Aranjuez. "One person who does interest me, however, is your friend Thornton. It was he who was to organise the affair, isn't that so? You imagined that his face might be less familiar to us."

Barry was silent. Then: "No. I wished to see him about quite another matter."

"Your loyalty is both mistimed and inapposite," said Aranjuez. "I have told you that I do things thoroughly. While we sit here talking, Thornton is sitting in my car in the courtyard . . . yes, at this very moment. When I took leave of him he was biting his nails: a nervous reaction perhaps accounted for by the fact that he had not been expecting to make my acquaintance."

"But he was to come here to-morrow . . ." began Barry. Then, rebuking himself, said no more: the last thing he desired was to implicate the unfortunate Don Esteban.

If Aranjuez noticed the lapse, he gave no sign. He continued: "Thornton received a telegram saying that the interview had been arranged for to-day, not to-morrow. As I have told you, he was somewhat perturbed when I introduced myself at the station . . . particularly since he was in the company of a charming lady who appeared to know me very well."

"Poor Desmond," said Barry.

"Yes," said Aranjuez. "It would have been wiser for Señor Thornton to have remained in the Consular Service. In recent months he has drawn attention to himself in several ways, notably by his frequent visits to the frontier region of Puigcerda."

"Ah? I thought from his letters that he must have been up to something."

"He is perhaps more to be pitied than blamed," said Aranjuez. "I am told that his wife has left him."

"No!" said Barry in genuine surprise.

"Oh yes, and for another man, too. That is always so tragic, is it not? I think you had better take your friend firmly in hand. Otherwise he might perform some foolishness . . . or should I say, some *further* foolishness. Only the other day I thought the time had come to give him a small but salutary fright. He takes an interest in the export of precious metals, you must understand, and seems to imagine that nobody else does. Consequently, I sent a couple of men up to bring him in for a little chat . . . rather like this one which we are having now. It is true that the men bungled the thing and ran away, but your friend seems to have been completely mistaken as to their identity."

"How the world moves on while I'm behind the bars!" said Barry. He looked at Aranjuez sardonically. "I thought your men never ran away," he said.

"Alas, they are sometimes obliged to," said Aranjuez. "On this particular occasion I understand that the cry was raised that the Civil Guards were coming, and of course my organisation does not much care for official interference in its activities, so that my men decided to withdraw."

"How fortunate for Thornton."

"Possibly, but, as I was telling him in the course of our very pleasant journey together from the station, he need no longer concern himself with the metal export trade. With the aid of modern mine detection apparatus I have now nationalised it."

"One may indeed say that you are a man of parts," said Barry.

"An efficient card-index system and a good memory are always useful supplements to one's natural intelligence," said Aranjuez. "I was consulting both the other day in connection with Señor Thornton. The results were interesting. Do you by any chance remember an attack upon a mail van which took place in Valencia last year?"

Barry looked at him sharply. "No," he said.

"You were perhaps in your boat at sea, and so out of touch with newspapers?"

"Yes, very likely I was."

"But you could check the dates: no doubt you keep a log book?"

"No doubt I do," said Barry, "but if I work for you, my past activities remain my own concern. That must be clearly understood."

"Very well," conceded Aranjuez. He smiled. "More especially so when they took place outside Spanish territory. However, to return to the point at issue, three men of this gang were killed in the attack I speak of . . . but one man escaped."

"How unusually lax of your police," said Barry.

"That is what I said at the time. Perhaps your friend Señor Thornton said so, too? He was in a good position to judge, having arrived in Valencia only a few days previously."

"Oh, I'm sure that, as a civic-minded citizen, Desmond would naturally abhor such an outrage."

"D'you think so? Then perhaps it was because he was so shaken by the state of lawlessness prevailing in Valencia that he then made a trip to Tangiers?" enquired Aranjuez blandly.

"Ah, yes," said Barry. "I remember that visit now. We had some fine times together."

"Then you must be the only person who does remember it. Don't you think it rather curious that Thornton's signature in the visitors' book at the Atlantic Hotel there should differ so strikingly from other specimens of his handwriting which are now in my possession?"

"He was perhaps drunk when he signed the book," suggested Barry.

"I agree that he is frequently drunk," said Aranjuez, "but I don't think he can have been drunk in Tangiers because, in my opinion, he never set foot in the place. Someone else forged that signature for him, someone else fabricated other evidence to give the impression he had been in the town."

"Now who could have done a foolish thing like that?" said Barry.

"You, for example," said Aranjuez.

"Me? But, my dear fellow, my log-book will probably show that I was at sea at the time."

"Will it? Come now, Keating: you have just told me that you passed several enjoyable evenings with Thornton."

Barry grinned. "So I did . . . so I did . . . please excuse a slip of the tongue."

"Unfortunately, we are not talking of the tongue but of murder and robbery," said Aranjuez. "I said a moment ago that one of the bandits concerned in that affair, all of whom came from France, escaped. It was not at all easy for him to escape and in the normal course of events he would never have been permitted to do so, because the frontier was closely guarded. However, if he went by sea, that would be quite a different matter wouldn't it?"

"Why, was he a good swimmer?" said Barry.

"Don't be childish, Señor Keating," said Aranjuez. "The conversation we are having now is not for amusement but is intended to determine our future relations." He paused. "Are you fond of Thornton?" he said suddenly.

"I am very fond of him."

"In that case, once again, let me strongly advise you to take him under your wing. Your own indiscretions are a technical matter which I propose to forget. Those of Thornton, on the other hand, are becoming increasingly tiresome, and must cease."

"Then perhaps it would be best if you were to tell me exactly what you have against poor Desmond?" said Barry. He spoke calmly, but within himself he was far from calm.

"Very well," said Aranjuez, "the man who escaped from that affray was called Heras. It has taken me a considerable time, but I have now established the fact that this man was once employed as a servant by Thornton, in France. Since Thornton was clearly not in Tangiers after the robbery, his movements during four days remain unaccounted for. Do you think you could enlighten me concerning them?"

"Wait a moment: let's get this straight," said Barry. "What you are really doing, isn't it, is to threaten Thornton through me? If I enter your service then you have a guarantee of my loyalty because at any moment you can do things to a friend of mine. Am I right?"

"You may put it like that," said Aranjuez, "though personally I would have preferred to do so rather more elegantly."

"Never mind the elegance. The fact is that Thornton is to be a kind of hostage for my good behaviour?"

"Not exactly. Let us say, rather, that the time has come for your friend to realise that his position is delicate . . . more delicate perhaps than anything which I have said here has suggested?"

"Do you know," said Barry suddenly, "I think you were working from firm ground a few moments ago but that now you have begun to bluff."

"You should be the best judge of that," said Aranjuez.

The two men stared at one another.

"Yes," said Barry. "You are undoubtedly bluffing."

"And you are endeavouring to provoke me to an indiscretion," said Aranjuez equably. He paused. "Very well," he said, "I have referred to Thornton's recent pantomime upon the frontier . . . would you like me to add that I now know with whom he was dealing?"

"You'd hardly be a Chief of the *Seguridad* if you didn't," said Barry. "I asked for an indiscretion, not an official communiqué. Anyway, why don't you arrest Thornton if he annoys you so much?"

"But I don't wish to arrest anybody," said Aranjuez plaintively. "I am all for peace and quiet . . . and co-operation: above all for co-operation. If Señor Thornton ceases to play the fool, I see no reason whatever to deprive him of his liberty. You are his friend. Speak to him. You can even give him command of your boat during your absences. Indeed, I think that would be an excellent idea . . ."

"An excellent means of putting the grip on him, you mean, don't you?" said Barry.

"Oh, that, I think, we have already done," said Aranjuez. "I mentioned certain things, but there are, of course other items." From his inside pocket he took a folded newspaper cutting. With some ceremony he laid this gently upon the table; then he caressed it with his index finger. "At what point on the French coast did you usually disembark your contraband?" he said.

"At various points," replied Barry. He stared steadily at the newspaper cutting, and, more particularly, at the finger moving on its surface.

"Then possibly you know a place called Bédoule?"

"I have heard the name."

Aranjuez handed Barry the newspaper cutting. He watched him reading it.

"Odious and vulgar these crimes of violence, don't you agree?" he said presently. "And extremely boring when they remain unsolved so that one is constantly obliged to read about them . . .

the victim was a British Consul, I notice: quite a coincidence! Then there is the date, too . . . why, this must have taken place just a few days after all that trouble in Valencia."

"You should have been an actor," said Barry, with indifference. He replaced the cutting on the table. "Do you make it a practice to follow cases of this sort?" he said.

"When my attention is drawn to them . . . yes," said Aranjuez. "In this instance I have been persecuted for months by the French police. You'd hardly believe it but they actually sent an inspector to see me in Madrid . . . a man called Poinset, with the strangest theories. You'd laugh if I told you some of them."

"Yes, I dare say that I would laugh," said Barry. "Supposition is often amusing—but of course proof is quite another matter."

"Oh, I agree entirely with you there," said Aranjuez, "but have you noticed that, in France particularly, when a case has dragged on too long, there is often a tendency to arrest somebody . . . almost, as it were, haphazard . . . somebody who may not even be the guilty party?"

"No, I have not noticed that at all."

"Yet I assure you it is so. Ah well, let us hope there will be no miscarriage of justice in this case."

Aranjuez rose. "Well, shall we be going . . . or do you wish to say a few farewells first, to the Governor, and to that warden who was so anxious to promote your love affairs? I assure you it will be a pleasure for me to sign your release downstairs."

Barry, too, had risen. Now he advanced towards the door. "Just a moment," he said.

"Yes?"

"I don't know whether you've found it in *your* life," said Barry, "but I've found it in mine that an association which begins with threats upon one side very seldom prospers . . . for either party."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean by that remark," said Aranjuez. "I have made no threats. Our discussion has been general and, let us hope, useful."

"You'd do well, all the same, to remember what I say."

"Very well: I promise to remember it. And now shall we talk of something more pleasant . . . of Señora Thornton, for instance? I am told she is a most attractive woman. What a pity that they

and movement . . . then . . . why, then she discovered, with some surprise, that she was ready to move . . . and yet, not entirely ready.

Because it was one thing, Dominique now realised, to be ready to change residence: quite another to dismantle and bind up with cord the cot which had held a child last night. From the nursery, half, perhaps rather more than half, of the toys were gone, and there were difficulties concerning this state of affairs when Barbara returned from school in the evening: "*The teddy bear? He's at the doctor's, darling.*" Then, later, to her husband: "I packed the teddy bear. I know they held it jointly but Barbara's too old for dolls now."

"That's quite all right."

He seemed to be as anxious as herself to avoid a quarrel.

Dominique finally decided to place the packed bags in the spare room, with the door locked. Barbara gave no sign of knowing that anything was afoot, but on one occasion Dominique found her in the passage, holding Geneviève by the hand, and staring at the door.

She wondered whether Thornton had said anything to his daughter but preferred not to enquire. She wished, above all, to avoid recriminations. Life was already sufficiently intolerable with Pepita moving about the flat wearing that set and disapproving smile, weeping over shredded cabbage.

Dominique knew, of course, that her husband must visit Seville. She was very glad that this should be so, because his absence would provide an opportunity to make her move without fuss: perhaps even without hurt.

One morning, in the bathroom, while he was shaving, she looked at him, touched the lather on his face with her finger. "Poor Desmond," she said. "I suppose things will go badly with you now." She looked at his eyes: when they were not shot and suffused with blood she had always liked his eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I dare say they will."

"Are you very miserable?" She did not say this in a taunting way, but gently, with much love: she wished to know.

"No doubt I'll make some protective arrangements."

"Yes, I know you will, Desmond, but you won't keep to them."

"No; probably not."

"What *do* you want, Desmond, darling? Why do you always make it so difficult?"

"I'm sure I don't know. There are various explanations. The most popular is that I never grew up, and so continued to believe in fairy tales."

She watched him shaving. "The bed is not enough," she said.

"Oh yes?" he said, "have you discovered that?"

Next day, for once, they chanced to have lunch together; or, rather, he sat and watched her eat, then, pushing aside her plate, produce paper and pencil, begin to tot up figures: she always seemed to be doing sums now.

"You make such lovely scrambled eggs," she said. "I shall miss them."

"Will you?"

"Desmond, when are you going to Seville?"

"To-morrow. I've just had a telegram."

"Ah? In that case, don't you think it might be best if I moved while you're away? It would be so much less painful for both of us."

"Very well."

She looked at him curiously:

"Don't you even want to know where I'm going?"

"I suppose I shall find out soon enough."

She was taken aback by his attitude, which seemed to be less one of indifference than of apathy. "And Barbara?" she said. "I presume you're taking her with you?"

"No. Freddy Cherr has very kindly agreed to look after her for a few days. A broken marriage seems no excuse for broken time at school."

Dominique said nothing, but she frowned and pursed her lips. Of course, she thought, he could perfectly well have taken the child with him, but she is so much more useful to him here: no doubt he presents her to everybody in the role of the abandoned waif.

"What have you told Barbara?" she said.

"I've said that you're going for a while to France."

"And if she meets me in the street?"

"Then I'll say that you've come back—or, if you prefer, that it was just someone who looked like you."

All through that afternoon and evening Dominique debated within herself how best to face the coming ordeal of their parting;

but, next day, when, having slept late and alone, she called to Pepita for coffee, she was informed that her husband and his daughter, with two packed suitcases, had already left the house.

"But did he say nothing: didn't he even speak to Geneviève?"

"Yes, of course he spoke to her."

"Then what did he say?"

A mutinous expression appeared on Pepita's face. She began to cry. "I'll run your bath, señora," she said.

"Don't be stupid, Pepita," said Dominique. "What happened . . . what did he say?"

"Ach, leave me alone," said Pepita in a harsh voice, and she ran out of the bedroom. Nor, later, although she approached the subject by more devious and tactful means, could Dominique persuade her maid to give information.

* * * *

Dominique had intended to begin her move, in a leisurely manner, on the following day, but at the last moment the woman from whom she had taken the new flat—a German, who was returning to her native country—begged for a week's grace, pleading difficulties over her visa. Dominique pretended to be angry at this delay, but in reality she was well pleased: there was so much to transport . . . so much . . . and she felt convinced that her husband, if appealed to agreeably, would help her. Of course, it would have been possible to have enlisted Paco, with his car, for this task—he had several times offered his aid—but Paco was too compromising: one could not foresee what the porter downstairs, who was supposed to know nothing, would say at the sight of a strange man surrounded by prams and suitcases. Then there was the other porter, the new one, whose feelings must also be considered. Oh yes, thought Dominique, if one must arrive with an escort, then it was clearly preferable that this escort should be somebody who would not visit her subsequently: who, in the course of time, could be passed off as having been a willing relative in transit: a brother, or perhaps a cousin . . . though even here there were difficulties. Geneviève must not be allowed to spoil everything by crooning "*Papa . . . Papa*" all the way upstairs in the lift. But this could, perhaps, be avoided by installing Geneviève only at the very last moment.

Meanwhile, quite apart from her work, Dominique had much

with which to occupy her mind. She had never lived alone before, and the prospect appeared both attractive and slightly intimidating. Should she resume her maiden name, she wondered? This idea appealed to her, but seemed difficult of execution: marriage was, after all, a useful rite, proving that one had formerly been respectable, even if such no longer seemed to be the case. Eventually Dominique compromised: she would be '*Mademoiselle Thibaud*' at her place of business. '*Señora Thibaud-Thornton*' when at home.

Thus the time passed pleasantly enough, with many projects and the entire exciting future with which to occupy the mind. Dominique bought several books which gave advice on life, for the benefit of bachelor girls. She read them assiduously, but was disappointed to discover that they said nothing about the place of children in such establishments. With Paco, although she saw him every evening, she was somewhat reserved, refusing all but the good-night kiss and behaving, indeed, as the books said one should do towards a person with whom an unofficial engagement was contemplated.

On the fifth day of her husband's absence Dominique became uneasy. Perhaps he had not gone to Seville at all, but to England; or to France, to see her father? During all these past weeks Dominique had been so preoccupied with her own affairs that she had not considered that her husband might also be making plans . . . and perhaps plans for her discomfiture. That evening, on returning from her work, she carried out a careful inspection of the flat. Everything seemed to be in order. True, Desmond's passport and personal identity papers were missing, together with Barbara's, but he would have required the former in any case for his journey, and might well have handed the child's, for safe keeping, to Freddy Cherr. Dominique did not like Freddy and had no desire to expose herself to ridicule, but obviously the only way to discover whether Barbara was in fact at the Cherr's was to telephone. She decided, however, to mask the true purpose of her call by inviting Freddy to a fashion show.

"Hullo . . . Freddy? This is Dominique."

"Dominique? Where are you speaking from?"

"From the flat. I rang to ask whether you'd like tickets for our private show next week."

"My dear, I'd love them . . . but what's this about the flat? I thought you were in another flat now."

"I shall be in a day or two," replied Dominique evasively.

"I think everybody must be mad," said Freddy in a voice which jarred the earpiece of the telephone: "You don't happen to know how long I'm supposed to keep Barbara, do you?"

"I didn't know you had her," said Dominique. This seemed the safest thing to say. "Would you like me to take her back?"

"My dear, don't be so tantalising, how can I send her back when I'm only supposed to have taken her because you were going away? Are you quite sure you know who is leaving whom? Where is Desmond?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Dominique grimly.

She spent a sleepless night, during the course of which she wept for more than half an hour over Geneviève and several photographs of herself as a small girl. In the morning she took a taxi to the central Post Office, and there wrote a long and incoherent telegram to her father, warning the old man to believe nothing that Desmond might tell him. She handed this in, and had just regained her taxi when the conviction struck her with unanswerable and annihilative force that her husband had gone, not to France, but to England, abandoning everybody. She returned to the telegraph counter.

"I want that telegram back, please."

"I'm afraid it has been despatched now, señora."

Far too upset by this time to go to work, Dominique instructed the taxi-driver to take her home. On the way, unable to control herself, she wept again. Yes, that was it, of course: from spite, from a vile and perverse desire to hurt, so strong that it blinded him even where his bounden duties to his own daughter were concerned, Desmond had fled beyond the reach of European jurisdiction, leaving his wife with a string of insolent tradesmen to satisfy, and two flats upon her hands.

Oh, I could kill him, thought Dominique. . . . *kill him*, and her tears flowed anew. She was quite unaware that she had spoken aloud, unaware even that the taxi had stopped, and that they had arrived, until she noticed the driver, his face framed in the partition, looking curiously at her.

The man's face seemed familiar. "You're Señor Thornton's wife, aren't you?" he said. "I dare say you remember me: I drove you when you first came to Barcelona; you were crying that day, too . . . drove your little girl home, too, a month or so

ago. Had some fine times with your old man, I have. Quite a character, though I wager he's difficult to manage."

"I am not interested in my husband's low friends," replied Dominique coldly. She looked at the taxi-driver with a dislike all the more intense because she knew that she must appear to him dishevelled and tear-stained. Suddenly an idea occurred to her: *of course*, it would have been just like Desmond with his insane sentimentalism over details to have asked this man, with whom he was evidently on terms of friendship, to drive him on his last trip through the city, to the station or the airport.

"Have you seen him?" she said. "Do *you* know where he is?"

The taxi-driver grinned at her. "Funny you should ask that—" he said, "that looks like him getting out of that taxi just ahead of us: with a lady, too!" The driver gave a coarse whistle. "What a man!" he said. "What a coincidence."

With a cry compounded of surprise and rage Dominique leapt out of her taxi and sped along the pavement in the direction of her husband. She recognised the woman with him, instantly, as the Nuria Something-or-Other who had come to dinner that night with José Beltran. How like Desmond, she thought, how utterly typical of him not even to wait until she was out of the house before he brought his woman home.

"Where have you been?" she said violently.

Thornton had not seen her approaching. He looked at her in bewilderment. "Why, in Seville, of course," he answered. Angry as she was, Dominique observed that he looked tired and ill, with an air almost of desperation about him. "I thought you'd gone away," he said slowly.

"Oh yes, I can see what you thought well enough," said Dominique with a sharp toss of her head in the direction of the other woman, who, standing somewhat apart, had been watching the scene with amusement, and who chose this moment to intervene:

"There seems to be some misunderstanding," she said, coolly, to Thornton. "Would it not be better if I came another time?"

Thornton gazed from one woman to the other. His situation was, indeed, far from enviable, but he appeared to make an effort to pull himself together. "Yes, very well," he said to Nuria. "I'm sorry about this. Perhaps we could do it to-morrow instead. I'll give you a ring." He looked round for her taxi, but this vehicle,

after depositing his baggage, had departed, so, after a moment's hesitation, he approached the other; to be hailed with delight and many friendly gestures by its driver.

"Take this lady away for you, Señor Thornton? Anything you say. Just brought one lady for you . . . crying, too. What a man!"

"For God's sake shut up, will you," said Thornton. He opened the door for Nuria, raised his hand as if to wave as she drove away; then apparently thought better of it.

Dominique was waiting for him on the pavement.

"I suppose it's some consolation to have left that bitch to pay what I had on the meter," she said viciously. "You don't waste your time, do you, Desmond? Perhaps you'd like to tell me now what it is you could both do better to-morrow than to-day."

And she looked at him sardonically: although, in truth, the tear-stains and the rivulets of powder on her face gave her rather a pathetic than a menacing appearance.

"We were going to interview maids," he replied glumly.

"Oh yes, that's a likely story, isn't it?"

"If you don't believe me . . . look," he said.

Dominique turned. Already, when sitting in the taxi, she had been vaguely aware of a bustling activity in this normally quiet and deserted street, but the shock of seeing her husband in inadmissible company had, in those first moments, removed every other consideration from her mind. Now, peering again, she saw that the pavement in front of the house was crowded with women: some of these women, no doubt the more orderly, had formed a queue by the door: many more were walking about, engaging each other, the passers-by and an ever growing and ever more licentious crowd of male admirers, in sprightly conversation. Nor was this all: at some stage a determined assault had been made upon the building, so that now, as Thornton and Dominique advanced, the hall, too, was seen to be crowded with women, before whom, defending the stairway, the porter, a decent but physically puny hunchback, stood with arms held wide in a gesture of defiance, his large yellow teeth bared in a grin of exasperated fear.

"Oh, Desmond . . . you fool," said Dominique, caught between laughter and tears.

"Ssh! Don't talk so loud," he muttered. "How could I know, there'd be so many of them?"

With face averted, he entered the building. Dominique

followed. Perceiving them and his own unique chance of safety, the frantic porter sprang forward. Thornton attempted to silence him with a terrible look and, when this failed, and the man began to gibber, by pinching his arm.

"Not a word . . . d'you hear? Tell them all to come to-morrow."

"But, Señor Thornton, the other tenants are complaining," The pair spoke in whispers.

"I can't help that. If they want a maid they can pick one out."

Without waiting for a reply, he pushed Dominique into the lift, entered it himself and slammed the door: not a moment too soon, either, for already several of the women who had observed his exchanges with the porter were complaining loudly that the newcomer's blondness alone proved that he must be the *Ingles* who had inserted the advertisement, that it was a crime to treat working-girls in this manner, that compensation for lost time should be paid; and other remarks of an even more provocative nature which faded only gradually into inaudibility as the lift gained height.

"Well!" said Dominique, as they entered the flat. "What did you say in your advertisement . . . that you were opening a brothel? You've certainly managed to collect all the less successful parts in Barcelona."

"Don't exaggerate," replied Thornton sulkily. "I saw some very steady-looking women among them."

"My God, Desmond . . . if you think that, you must be cross-eyed. Come on now . . . own up . . . what *did* you put?"

"I said I was a foreign widower with a child, if you must know."

Dominique burst out laughing: "The Merry Widower!" she said. "Oh, Desmond!"

"Well, what d'you expect me to say?" he asked aggrievedly. "I can't insert my entire life story in an advertisement: it costs too much. It's not my fault if they've no typographical abbreviation in Spain to suit my peculiar case."

"Why don't you let *me* see them?" she said.

"Certainly not," he replied stiffly.

"I'm sure I'd choose you a better one than that odious woman could."

"You don't seem to realise," he said, "that you're not officially

living here any more. What *are* you doing here, anyway? I thought you said you were leaving last Monday?"

"And I thought you were in Seville and was beginning to feel sorry for you—but now I find you've been away with that pretentious wind-bag. Really, Desmond, you might choose as my successor somebody I could admire."

"I met her in the train," he said defensively.

"Going, or coming?"

"Going, if you must know."

"And you expect me to believe that?"

"I didn't believe it myself until I got to Seville and found out why."

He looked at her bleakly for a moment, then threw himself upon the sofa. Mechanically he reached towards the side-table for a newspaper, but the paper was old; he had read it before: he threw it aside.

Dominique watched him stretch dusty shoes upon unyielding leather: then she opened the window and looked down at the street. "They're still there," she said. "I hope they don't molest Pepita when she comes back from her shopping." She hesitated, then, nearing the sofa, she put her hand on his forehead. "Are you in some trouble?" she said. "Your face looks awful."

"Yes, I'm in trouble," he said.

"Is it your friend Barry?"

"No, not him. He's been released. He's in Madrid now. He's going to France."

"That's where I thought you might have gone," said Dominique with sudden frankness.

"Me . . . whatever for?"

"I thought you might have gone to see Papa. I thought all sorts of things, if you must know," she paused. "Desmond, if something terrible has happened tell me. Remember: I shall always be your friend."

"Will you? Even if one day they come and ask you questions?"

"Who come and . . . what questions?" Dominique stared at him. Her face grew pale. "Desmond, it's not . . . it's not *that*, is it?" she said.

"Yes, I'm afraid it is precisely that."

"Oh, God! I always knew this would happen . . . I felt it coming. How much do they know?"

"That's more difficult to say. They proceed by hints, you see."

"Who do? Oh, Desmond, stop being mysterious. How can I help you when you won't tell me what's happened?"

He looked at her wearily. "It's not my fault if I'm mysterious," he said. "I've suddenly been projected into a mysterious world."

* * * * *

When Pepita entered with Geneviève, she found them sitting on the sofa, holding hands. Pepita gave a start of surprise, but was far too well bred to make other than ocular comment upon a scene not played these many months.

"There's a crowd of bad women downstairs calling themselves maids," she said. "I told them I was the *chica* here, and to go away."

Dominique looked in interrogation at Thornton, who shrugged. Geneviève had climbed on his knee and was pulling at his tie. He kissed her, pulling at the bow-knot at the back of her skirt.

"No," said Dominique. "Take Genny away, Pepita, and shut the door. You can bring us lunch in an hour. We're talking."

They talked over, and round, the subject during the remainder of that morning, and even throughout lunch: or, more precisely, Dominique talked, asking questions, to which Thornton made replies, some of them evasive; all of them obscure and contradictory.

"So what it comes to is this," said Dominique at last. "These people want Barry to work for them, and think they have a hold on him through you."

"I suppose so." Now, as throughout the previous discussion, Thornton's attitude was strangely apathetic.

"Yes, but they have no proof . . . none at all . . . they *can't* have any, and, besides, these are Spanish people, whereas *that* happened in France. Oh, Desmond, why did you have to get involved in all that business on the frontier with Damien? You couldn't have chosen a better way of drawing attention to yourself."

He made no reply.

"Are you sure there's not something you're holding back?" She watched him intently. Then, since he continued to say nothing:

"Yes, there is. You're going to go in with Barry now, aren't you? You're going to look after his boat . . . yes, I can see by your face that you are."

Again he did not answer.

"Why don't you go back to England, instead?" she said. "Can't you see that life can only finish badly for you here?"

He looked at her. There was just the trace of a smile on his lips. "They might not let me have an exit visa."

"But you don't *need* an exit visa if this thing about the boat is true. You could land in North Africa, or Tangiers . . . anywhere . . . the Sahara if you wanted. Oh, Desmond, do listen to me: I can't tell you how strongly I feel that things are closing in round you."

"Things never close in," he said. "They snap tight, suddenly. Rabbits know all about that. They see the farmer coming: what fun, they think, to gambol in the heather scrub and watch the creature put those squat things near our burrows. Next morning, searching for the sweeter grass, they soon know better." He paused. His eyes were not so much melancholy: it just seemed as if they had *stopped*!

"I might consider going to England if . . ." Abruptly he stopped talking. His face flushed as he looked at her. "Yes, on one condition I might go," he said.

Dominique understood immediately. She took his face between her hands. She advanced her own face so that their foreheads touched; so that his two eyes became a single eye set above the long ramp of his nose: "Desmond, you know I'd do anything for you," she spoke softly, "but not that . . . not at the moment. I don't know why you spoilt our love but you did spoil it. Let me work things out for myself now . . . in my own way. Don't you owe me that, at least? Later, I may feel quite differently, I may see your point of view; but, here in this room, to-day, a part of me still goes on hating you, considers you unjust. What do you and I care about legal separations . . . documents, and all that lawyer's talk? If I can—and if you still want me: but you *won't*—I'll come back to you, but let me learn first how to live alone without you crushing me. Don't forget I've never lived with anyone but you, and Father, never gone anywhere except with one or other of you . . . his daughter, *your* wife, always somebody's appendage; the little girl without a name which she could call her own."

He withdrew his face from hers: "You must forgive a momentary and stupid impulse," he said. "When do you propose

to leave . . . to-night? Then perhaps I can help you finish off your packing."

Dominique recoiled as if he had struck her physically. "You see," she said. "You *see* . . . the bitterness will be on your side, not on mine. You'll live with it and cultivate it, you'll even try to spoil the memory of the early days: the only decent piece of love and trust and hope that we have left between us."

"Except possibly a piece of living, breathing flesh in the shape of a small child aged two," he said, and he spoke rapidly, as if each word were a blow. "The child has blue eyes. Presumably, she got them somewhere. Later—but don't worry, only *much* later—people will wonder where. The child also possesses certain infant memories, but these of course will disappear, to be replaced by others involving bags of sweets held out in an ingratiating manner by hands so much better manicured than those to which she has hitherto been accustomed. Yes, it will be a new, exciting life for Genny now . . . she'll be quite surprised at the number of her honorary uncles. You had best teach her quickly how to count."

"How *can* you bring Genny into it like that, in that vulgar way?" said Dominique. "Surely over her, at least, we can be friends?"

"How can I keep her out of it, you mean," he replied. She observed, with satisfaction, that the accusation of vulgarity had hurt him. "Friends indeed! I suppose you suggest I take little walks with her and Pepita in the park, or visits to the Zoo . . . 'That's a camel, darling' . . . 'Yes, Papa, I know.' I suppose you mean little lunches with you from time to time, to discuss her future and such small problems as an increase in your allowance or the embarrassment which might be caused by my attending some film first-night because you'll be there with someone else?"

"I don't mean anything," she said. She was not quite as miserable as she looked, but very nearly so: the small difference between truth and performance was due to habit, not to insincerity. "I don't mean anything at all except that this is our last day, and that I loved you, and that I love you still, although I know it's quite impossible. Won't you be nice, Desmond . . . just this once, just for a few hours? Can't you see what I'm suffering? I used to think you had imagination: is it all devoted now to your own problems?"

He watched her intently as she said that: he observed every

separate line and contour of the face which he knew so well, and which he would now, he supposed, gradually forget. Thornton would have liked to die, to disappear for ever, demanding nothing in return but that this woman should inherit his entire experience; all that he had seen and done and partially understood, all that he had seen other people do and appear to understand, within the compass of the thirty-six years of his existence. Never, quite so implacably as at this moment, had he been so thoroughly aware of the final horror of the human condition; the isolation of each separate and indefensible unit from its neighbour, the insistence, the nagging, the shrill demands of self-interest and vanity.

He took her hand. "Yes, I'm sorry," he said. "You are perfectly right. I must pay for the child's existence as I must pay for everything else. It was quite unforgivable of me to speak of her."

Dominique listened to this belated admission of facts far too long, too obvious, without surprise. "You're in one of your doomed moods now," she said.

"Yes," he said. "It's my liver, or perhaps my brain. These are the popular explanations, I believe. It is certainly true that the liver is important . . ."

Quite suddenly he stopped talking, appalled by his own perpetual inconsequence. Here he sat, within a few hours of final separation from his second wife; with a dreadful and, no doubt, from this moment, permanent threat to his liberty from another quarter to be reckoned with; faced also with the loss of a child who, for some reason which he could not define, was more dear to him by far than her sister (though he suspected that this was because Genny's glance was not yet critical) . . . here he sat, *talking*, but feeling nothing, like an actor delivering lines half-learned, negligently, in rehearsal, his ear cocked for the whisper of the prompter and for the producer's comment.

"Somebody is at the door," said Dominique suddenly.

"Señor Fife is here," said Pepita, entering.

"Show him in." Thornton turned to his wife. "The first of the vultures," he said. "This will be amusing. He must have thought you'd gone."

But Fife had apparently been informed by Pepita that they were both present, for, although noticeably nervous, he showed no surprise when shaking hands. Three or four minutes of stilted

conversation ensued. He had been passing on his way to work . . . so long since they had met . . . thought he would look in and see them: then came the master stroke, designed, no doubt, to divide them, to oblige each to answer separately . . . would they care to come to dinner one evening?

Thornton looked at the young man sardonically, but it was Dominique who answered. "What a pity," she said in a clear voice, "but I don't think we're free much just now. Are we, Desmond?"

Thornton grinned at her. "I'm sure I don't know, dear," he said. "It's you who keep the engagement book."

Baffled, but not yet disarmed, Fife attacked from another quarter. Perhaps they could help him . . . a small matter . . . was Dominique by any chance registered at the French Consulate?

"Yes, what about it?"

"Oh, nothing, but they had received an enquiry, from the Ministry of the Interior, in Madrid . . . no accompanying explanation . . . just that . . . was she listed in the British files? . . . A rather unusual proceeding; he could not remember it ever having occurred before."

"And what did you reply?"

"Well, we said she wasn't, of course."

A few minutes later, when they had succeeded in driving the intruder away by their undisguised hostility, husband and wife looked at each other thoughtfully.

"I hate people who come to *gloat*," said Dominique.

"You'll have to get used to that. There'll be plenty of them . . . some for you, and some for me. After a good bankruptcy or a sentence for indecent exposure, there's nothing more amusing than a broken marriage. It goes on longer, too, and so can be dropped, then taken up again indefinitely, as gossip."

"What does it mean about the registration?" she asked.

"I don't know; I was wondering. It might be the first of many little pinpricks designed to keep me on the jump, or it might be that they were genuinely trying to find out if we were really married."

"But they could do that by a simple enquiry in France."

"Of course, but that would be too easy. In their world news is never good unless it comes through tortuous channels."

Dominique was silent, considering the matter. "No," she said

at length. "I think you're wrong: I think they wrote because they knew that Fife would be the man who answered. It was their way of telling him . . ."

"Telling him what?"

"That they were always there if he ever cared to make a statement. And he *could* talk, Desmond . . . and, what's more, he'd like to. I don't know why he hates you so much, but he does."

"You know perfectly well why he hates me," he answered evenly.

She placed her hands in his. "Don't worry," she said. "I'll take care of little Master Fife."

"I think his own lack of courage will do that," said Thornton. "Not of courage perhaps, exactly—but of conviction, certainly."

She twined her fingers around his: "I'm glad we had this conversation," she said, "it would have been terrible to have gone away knowing nothing . . . and you too proud to come and tell me."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that, Dommy. The instinct of self-preservation pops up even when one thinks it's absolutely dead."

"Then make some use of it now, Desmond," she said. "Stop drifting. Be careful what you say and do. Fife is dangerous because he was the only person who ever saw you meet . . . She broke off, unwilling to speak the name of that dead man.

"Fife knows I killed him," he said. "He's known it all along . . . morally. Later he found out about the boat, and then he knew *how* I did it. But Fife in his private capacity and Fife as a Consular official are two very different men. He'd love to talk, but it's too late now . . . too many awkward questions would be asked. . . . *Why didn't you come forward earlier, Mr. Fife . . . can it be that you are more concerned with the honour of your Service and your own prospects of promotion than to see justice done?*" Oh no, Fife can threaten, but he must keep quiet."

"I'll keep him quiet," said Dominique. Then, abruptly, she withdrew her hands: "And that woman? that Nuria . . . can she threaten, too?"

"I don't know." He spoke now in quite a different tone of voice.

"You don't know! You make two twelve-hour train journeys with her; in Seville it becomes perfectly apparent to you that she

is working for them, was even given the job of travelling with you . . . and you say you don't know?"

"She is a woman," he said.

"Yes, so you've discovered, no doubt, although you won't admit it. Take my advice: don't try and be too clever, Desmond. Why is she working for these people? Ask yourself that."

"I have asked myself, and I propose to find out."

"Do you? And by what means?"

"By the usual means where women are concerned," he said.

Dominique looked at him sharply. There was an expression on his face which she had never seen before: it made her want to hit him . . . And to hit him, curiously enough, less upon her own account than on behalf of this other woman whom she despised and hated.

* * * * *

Love is like a mine . . . a mine of precious metal . . . and this metal lies not in seams, in strata, ready for the pick, the drill, but flecked and slivered within cubic acres of hard and unproductive rock. When the discovery of the mineral is made, a shaft is sunk, shallow perhaps at first, but sinking ever deeper with the course of time; and, to each side of this shaft, galleries are excavated and machinery installed with which to bring the treasure to the surface of the earth, where, in what was once a barren countryside, hutments, barracks, slag-heaps—perhaps an entire township—have now made there the sign of shallow foundations.

The mine may remain economically productive for many years: on the other hand it may not remain productive at all. This is in no sense the fault of the mining engineers: these men detect the indications of fault of a future glory. They are not obliged to declare its probable endurance. There are mines of which the profitable working time cannot endure more than a few years. There are coal mines in Durham, in England; diamond mines in the African Rand; of which the resources are so great that the men who work them will learn, with vague and muted apprehension, that these mines may well be working as far ahead of the date of their own death as that date is distant from prehistoric times.

When a mine is worked out, what remains? . . . When the

precious metal can no longer be profitably exploited, as so often happens, what becomes of the personnel who once sang happily at night in the canteen?

The personnel disperse.

Hatred is a solitary passion, one which feeds upon the remembrance of wrongs suffered. By ten o'clock that night, as Thornton and his wife stood, conspirators, smiling at each other on the staircase outside the flat, waiting for the porter down below to go to bed so that they might sneak out, unseen, with their baggage, they were friends again . . . as friendly perhaps as they had ever been, for now at last, too late, sadness brought tolerance as its companion.

Thus it had been also, he remembered, a week or so before, when, the melancholy formalities of separation completed, they had walked away from the lawyer's office arm in arm; and Dominique had said:

"I feel almost as if we were getting married . . . not getting out of marriage.

And thus it was again now, as Thornton, making a last inspection of the flat in case some suitcase had been overlooked, discovered in Pepita's tiny bedroom a pile of groceries so large that it would have sufficed to feed the entire family for many days. He knew at once that these stores must have been ordered from the shop on the corner where he maintained an account, and returning to Dominique he said:

"Why did you do that, Dommy? There was no need for so much secrecy."

"It must have been Pepita," answered Dominique. She left him, entered the kitchen, closed the door. He heard ~~the~~ voices of the two women raised in anger and expostulation.

Presently Dominique returned.

"I've given her a good talking to," she said. Her face was flushed.

"Dommy . . . Dominy," said Thornton reproachfully. "You know it wasn't her, but you. It isn't right to blame Pepita."

"Very well," she said levelly, with a kind of pained defiance. "Very well . . . it was me."

"That's better," he said and perceiving that she was close to tears, he ran a finger gently down her cheek. "It's perfectly normal," he said, "a natural reaction . . . pregnant women have

them: unconsciously, you were thinking of Geneviève, I expect."

Half an hour later the move was over: he had carried her baggage downstairs to the taxi, out of that taxi, up more stairs, and into her new flat. He was now sitting awkwardly in a creaking wicker chair while she arranged things, her hands never still.

"Don't just sit there," she said, "almost with gaiety. "Go and inspect the place: tell me what you think of it."

He went out into the corridor, tripping against an empty suitcase, catching his coat in the hood of a pram. The flat was small, but it was neatly furnished, brightly painted. From the window of the room in which Geneviève would sleep it was possible, in this moonlight, to see the top floors of his own block of flats, less than half a mile away. An electric iron, standing on a sideboard, attracted his attention. He picked it up, caressing the cold, flat surface gently, as, earlier, he had caressed the cold cheek of his wife, and he smiled at his reflection in a mirror.

When, ten days before, Dominique had approached him with an inventory of their joint household possessions, stating what she proposed to take away for her own use, and what to leave him, he had acquiesced in everything—nearly all the blankets, more than half the cutlery—had not even offered much resistance when she demanded, as her right, the magnificent water-colour of Bédoule presented to them jointly by the man who had painted it. Only at the very end of his ordeal, childishly determined to gain at least one small, if humble, point, he had put his finger on the list and said that he must keep their electric iron.

"But, Desmond, you don't need an iron . . . your clothes go to the cleaner's. Now, I do need an iron, and I haven't got one in the new place."

And so she had taken away the electric iron, and would now possess two irons; though, of course, it was just possible that she had not noticed this one before.

He returned to the sitting-room, to find Dominique arranging papers in the writing-desk.

"Go out on the balcony," she said. "The view is wonderful."

He walked about the balcony, inspecting weary geraniums. In one corner he discovered a sandpit: "That will be nice for Geany," he thought. Behind the glass doors Dominique moved about busily: sometimes he saw her head, and sometimes her shadow.

On the mantelpiece, above the fake fireplace, he noticed a large silver cup. He moved closer, read the name and the inscription on the cup. Profiting by a momentary absence of Dominique in the kitchen he entered the sitting-room, lifted the lid of the cup, looked inside.

The cup contained snapshots and a few larger photographs of its owner, a sediment of drawing-pins and, finally, some small envelopes or *sachets* with the word 'Quinine' printed on them. He heard Dominique returning, and moved quickly towards the window.

"Well, I think that's enough for one night," she said, looking briskly round the room. "Shall we go?"

"Just as you please."

She put her hand on his arm. "Thank you for helping, Desmond," she said.

"Oh, that's all right." He helped her to put on her coat, then he looked for her gloves, then for her handbag: she was always losing these accessories.

"I'll instal Pepita and Genny after lunch to-morrow," she said.

"That's a good idea."

She looked at him curiously: "Will you be bringing Barbara back to-morrow evening?"

"I expect so."

"Do try and choose a good maid, Desmond—and choose her yourself: you don't need that woman's help."

He said nothing. They went down in the lift. "I don't like the mirror in this lift," she said, "you can't see yourself at all." At the street door she fumbled in her bag for the unfamiliar keys: "That reminds me," she said. "I'd better give you the keys of the old flat."

"Yes." Well, well, he thought, but without bitterness. . . . "*The old flat.*" Perhaps she would give him the element in the old iron, too: then he could put it in his old fire?

"Shall we go and have some coffee somewhere, Desmond? Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Yes."

They went to a café in the Calle Balmés, to which neither of them had ever been before. For a while they were silent, but when the coffee came Dominique said:

"Do you realise where this café is?"

"No, I can't say I do."

"It's almost exactly halfway between our two houses. You could call the Calle Balmés a kind of frontier between your part of the town and mine." Her face lit up with amusement at this idea. "Shall we make it a real frontier, Desmond? You won't come into my territory and I won't enter yours. We'll make a pact . . . like between nations."

"You mean a mutual security pact, I take it?"

"That's right . . . except when you come to visit me, of course."

"Very well: except for visits."

She touched his arm again: "You'll come often, won't you, Desmond?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"But I *want* you to come. There'll be lots of things I'll need to talk to you about." She pointed to his cup: "Can I have your lumps of sugar?"

"There may be less to say later," he said. He passed her the two lumps of sugar, in their paper wrappings.

She stirred her coffee. "What a horrid bar . . . all chrome and tarts," she said. "This coffee's horrid, too. Have you tasted yours?"

"No."

"I'm frightened, Desmond. I'm excited, but I'm frightened, too."

"Yes, I expect you are."

"I did love you, Desmond. I do love you still, but——"

"Let's not talk about it, then."

"You promise you'll come straight to me if you have any more trouble with that other business?"

"I don't know."

She pushed aside her coffee. "Please pay, and take me home," she said. He looked at her. He knew her so well that he knew exactly, and in the saddest detail, what she was thinking: she wished him to make love to her that night, wished to give herself to him so thoroughly that he would remember her always, when with other women.

And so it proved to be.

Ten

WHEN HE ARRIVED IN PARIS, in the early hours of a December morning, Barry Keating took a taxi to a small hotel in the Rue de la Boétie which had been recommended to him by Aranjuez. Here he booked a room for two nights, registering in the name of O'Donnell, which was that inscribed on the Irish passport in his possession.

"But why Irish?" he had asked, when receiving the passport in Madrid.

"Why not?" replied Aranjuez. "It is an interesting and Catholic little country, and it makes a change. The harp on the outer cover of the document is rather attractive, don't you agree? I always think most national coats of arms are so fantastically overladen. They resemble coal scuttles." And Aranjuez had wrinkled his nose as he sometimes did: like a cat refusing tainted milk.

When Barry had bathed, shaved, eaten his breakfast, he took an envelope from his suitcase. This envelope enclosed miscellaneous evidence concerning the past life of the fictitious O'Donnell. There was a birth certificate, for example, with an address in Booterstown, which is a suburb of Dublin. There was an imposing piece of parchment which asserted that O'Donnell was a member of the Catholic brotherhood known as the Knights of Sanctus Columbanus. There were four snapshots of a rather attractive girl: her name was apparently Eileen, since she had written it on the back of each, together with varied assurances of her unswerving and exclusive love. Finally, there was a biography of O'Donnell consisting of three typed pages which revealed how, from unpropitious beginnings, this admirable man had risen to his present important and pensionable employment as manager of a British shipping firm in Barcelona.

"Do I really have to memorise all this?" Barry had enquired, when first presented with the envelope.

"Certainly not," said Aranjuez. "You can throw it away if you wish, though in your place I should keep the birth certificate, for I imagine you must often face accusations of illegitimacy." He allowed himself to smile faintly. "No, my dear friend, these documents are unimportant. We provide them in order to give employment to a deserving class of society: I refer to those of our

younger novelists whose inventive powers would otherwise be so severely handicapped by the stringent provisions of our censorship laws."

During the three weeks which he had passed in Madrid, Barry had grown to like Aranjuez. In his own office, and to an ever greater extent outside office hours (they had driven once to Avila, and on another day lunched together in Toledo), the man shed much of his theatricality. On the last afternoon, just before Barry left to catch his train, Aranjuez had opened a drawer in his desk and shown the Englishman an album containing photographs of his wife and children.

And when Barry, who knew that Aranjuez never did anything gratuitously, had eyed him quizzically, he had said:

"You and I, Keating, are like men who discover each other only at the top of the same mountain because we came up by different routes."

Ten o'clock. Barry looked at his watch: time to go . . . much to do. In the street the winter sky, livid and low-flying, offered only a grey, uncertain light. From inside the taxi, which was transporting him towards the Madeleine, Barry regarded Paris with a glum distaste: he did not approve of these clammy, northern cities with their white-faced nervous-looking people. His own empire lay in the sun. He felt, even, an illogical, a supplementary, resentment against Paris because his French was far from fluent. Greek, Spanish, Arabic were his languages, and he had been accustomed for so many years to manipulating them with a forensic and blistering facility that it annoyed him to stand stuttering now before hall porters as if he were a tourist.

During the short drive it occurred to Barry that this was the closest he had been to his native country since the middle years of the war. He laughed. With an Irish passport in his pocket he could hop into a plane without the slightest risk, and be in Piccadilly within three hours. The idea of such an escapade amused him: it would indeed be droll to pay a swift, alarming visit to one or two people . . . to turn up at a regimental reunion, for example, and then make his escape as pink-faced patriots telephoned for the police. He wondered whether Aranjuez had foreseen his danger. Very probably the Spaniard was not a man to overlook the small temptations which might beset his operatives. .

At the bank, Barry presented his letter of credit. He was asked to wait, and presently was received by an assistant manager.

"What arrangements do you wish us to make for the sum at your disposal, monsieur?"

"None. I'll take it with me."

The man looked at him in surprise. "It is a very large amount. Would you not prefer to open an account?"

"No."

Barry's tone and his casual manner annoyed the official. He coloured, and spoke stiffly. "We are not in the habit of making up parcels for our clients," he said, "but, of course, since you appear to have no brief-case . . ."

"We'll see about that," said Barry. He walked across the hall, inspected various possible victims, finally nudged a man in a black overcoat who was standing by the Colonial payments grille.

"How much do you want for that case of yours?" he said, pointing to it.

"Eh?" This man, too, became annoyed. He blustered: "By what right, monsieur . . . who are you?"

"Will this be enough?" said Barry.

The man stared at the notes: he could buy five new brief-cases with the amount spread before him on the counter. "But I have papers, documents, in there . . ." he began weakly.

"Tuck them under your arm, then," said Barry.

Half a minute later he crossed the floor, the brief-case swinging in his hand. The manager was by now pale with anger. He accompanied Barry to a cashier: then left without saying good-bye.

"I'll sit down, if you don't mind, while your people fill it up," said Barry to the cashier. "These transactions are so sordid."

He did sit down, and he began to pare his nails. He was thinking of Aranjuez again. One day, one cloudless, sunny day, he would settle with Aranjuez, but there was no hurry about that and, meanwhile, the man and his methods were interesting to watch. "When all is said and done, I was perhaps becoming rather provincial in Tangiers," thought Barry. He continued to think about Aranjuez. Some men, he thought, are inferior to their profession, in which case the profession holds them in a kind of servitude so that they are no more than its tool, but other men are so strong that they can exercise that profession as they might any

other; as they might wear a suit of clothes. And the special tics and quirks of character which are inseparable from all professions are of no more importance in such men than would be the creases in their clothes: the suit is pressed; they begin again, perhaps the same game, or perhaps another. *

The money was ready. Barry nodded to the cashier, tucked the brief-case under his arm, left the building. He had not gone very far, however, before an instinct which seldom failed him in such circumstances caused him to turn his head. He slowed down, turned again, and saw another man slow down pace to suit his own. Barry walked back towards this man. He looked at him for a moment, then, without warning, reached forward with both hands and pulled open the man's overcoat.

Above the inner pocket a Madrid tailor's label showed.

"Well, that's all right, but tell me . . . will this go on all day?" said Barry pleasantly: "I might have private business to transact. If you were trying to make a girl, you wouldn't want me looking through the keyhole, would you?"

He rebuttoned the overcoat, but one button was missing: he stooped, and found it on the pavement.

The man was unperturbed. "Why did you draw all of the money?" he said.

"Why not?" said Barry. "I prefer it that way, and there were no instructions to the contrary. Look . . . there's a taxi. Let's continue our discussion inside. That'll save you expenses."

"All right," said the man. "Here," and he held out his hand for the button from his overcoat, "can you sew?" he said.

"No," said Barry.

"You ought to learn to sew before you play that trick again."

"I'll take a course in needleshop," said Barry.

"I suppose you'll have to put somebody else on the job now?" he continued sympathetically, when they were installed. He gave the taxi-driver the address of the Musée Rodin, in the Rue Garancière.

"Yes, I suppose I will," replied the man. But he did not seem too pleased about this aspect of the situation.

"You'll be stupid if you do," commented Barry. "I shall be taking a train down south to-night, I dare say. Don't you want to come along with me?"

The man looked at him suspiciously.

"Are you trying to be clever?" he said. "One button is enough."

"Not in the least," replied Barry. "You're paid to follow me. Why not do it in comfort?"

"And what do you get out of it, if I do?"

"Why, nothing," said Barry. "Except a little peace and quiet." He grinned. "It's my nerves," he said. "I don't think I could stand doing everything in slow motion for four days, just to allow you to send in a report."

The man frowned. He was a small man. His jaw was blue, and cleft, and truculent. His cheekbones were high, and he had a pair of those pale blue eyes which are striking in certain Spaniards because in such contrast to the darker pigmentation of the face.

"All this is most irregular," he said.

"Why?" said Barry innocently. "Is somebody following you, too?"

The man chuckled. "Well, you make a change at least," he said. "The last one I had to tail spent every afternoon looking at Engels's grave in the Père Lachaise cemetery."

"Do you know where I'm going now?" said Barry, observing him.

"Sure, I do. I heard you sing out the address, didn't I?"

"Well, since it coincides with what you've been told about my movements, why don't you go back to my hotel, put your feet up, and wait for me?"

"Is it me or yourself you're taking for a little child?" said the man.

"I forgot to add that you can have the brief-case," said Barry, and he laid it on his companion's knee.

"That's a different matter," said the man, but he continued to look puzzled none the less, shooting sharp little glances at Barry. Suddenly he snapped his fingers, opened the brief-case, and fumbled among the notes, holding several of them against the light so that he could see the watermark.

"You thought it might be the old substitution trick, did you?" said Barry, who had been watching this pantomime ironically. "That proves you weren't close enough to see what went on in the bank." He patted the man's knee. "Never mind, you'll learn. I'll teach you if you like."

The taxi drew up outside the Musée Rodin.

"I still don't get this," said the man.

"Let's put it this way: I just don't like being followed," said Barry engagingly. "I know it's quite normal but it offends a little bauble that I call my dignity. I don't like working alone, either, and I told your boss that—but he wouldn't listen. So I thought I'd please myself, and use you more profitably than as my shadow. I shall need someone to-morrow who doesn't lose his temper when he loses buttons."

He stepped out of the taxi, giving the driver the address of his hotel.

"Hey! Wait a minute, can't you," cried the man inside; but the taxi was already moving.

"See you around five o'clock," shouted Barry, with a wave.

* * * * *

"Only ten francs?" said Barry when asked to pay the entrance fee. "I must do this more often."

The man who sold the tickets was not amused. A muffler covered the lower part of his face. He looked at Barry with dislike.

"I don't wonder you feel cold in here with all this marble," said Barry. He took his ticket; the turnstile clicked; he entered the museum. It was just like Aranjuez, he thought, to have arranged for an important rendezvous in a stonemason's workshop. Why not a café, or, if it came to that, a hotel bedroom? these people were altogether too clever sometimes. Not that Barry was inaccessible to the siren call of art. By no means so: some of these nymphs and dryads, particularly the small plaster groups in the glass cases, with their rugby scrums of hairy and behorned satyrs on the outskirts, wreaths askew, clutching either at the ladies' buttocks or at lyres and lutes, were undoubtedly most fetching. Why . . . the god Pan, when tired of the more useful amusements, must have had enough musical talent available to form a woodland orchestra. &

Barry glanced at his watch. Yes, there was still time. So he gazed respectfully at an untitled lady's well developed nipples. Every bit of seven hundredweight: double that if you chucked in the plinth. And to think that it had all been just a large lump of stone before. The man must have had biceps like motor tyres. Patience, too . . . "chip . . . chip . . . chip . . . letting his lunch go cold day after day so that he could get her arse right.

Barry was not entirely ignorant in artistic matters. The son of a Norfolk landowning family he had been brought up with two Constables and a murky Richard Wilson on the dining-room walls, and his grandfather, who had purchased them, had not let Barry's youth pass without drawing his attention to the many virtues of the English landscape painters; so that only the other day when visiting—almost to his own surprise—the Prado, Barry had made straight for the English rooms, like a child for a new nursery, and there had stood in rapt and recollective admiration before the two magnificent Copley Fieldings which they contain.

How delightful to be an artist, thought Barry, how satisfying to possess the power of self-expression in tangible form, to rise at night, not because one could not sleep, but because driven by a crying urge to seize paper and pencil, or a brush . . . how splendid to be nagged to such a point by the simple contours of a water carafe or a woman's knee that one could not rest until one had created them again, to one's own satisfaction, on paper. It seemed to Barry that the pleasures and enthusiasms of his own life were dull and fastidious beside those of men such as this Rodin who had worked direct from Nature, with her endless phantasmagoria.

Barry passed on. He lingered before another piece of sculpture, but it was not Leda with her arched belly nor the immanent, predatory wings of the swan which interested him: he was thinking of the sculptor in his dirty smock, of the lifted chisel hacking, worrying at the stone until a curve appeared, of the chips of that same stone in the artist's beard and hair. "I suppose we all want to be what we can't be," thought Barry. He, too, would have preferred to be *useful*, constructive, but since this was evidently not where his talent lay he supposed that he must make the best of it.

Barry passed through more doors, bound for his rendezvous.

There were few visitors in the museum at that midday hour, so close to lunch-time, and in Room Number XII, which Barry reconnoitred cautiously, there were only two persons, apart from the attendant who was reading *Le Parisien libéré* in a corner.

Barry identified his man immediately: indeed, it would have been difficult to make a mistake because the man was an Arab. A thin, hungry-looking fellow, though well enough dressed, he wore a black hat many sizes too big for him. The collar of his overcoat

was turned up. He was looking with an air of bored despondency at a piece of statuary before which few normal men would have remained unmoved, for it represented Daphnis at the crisis of his life when, having at last laid urgent hands on Chloe, he discovered that the young lady was now more than half a tree.

Not one to waste prestige upon preliminaries, Barry approached the man, stood beside him. "I am the King of Siam," he said clearly, in Spanish. "Who are you?"

"I am the Lord of his Bedchamber," replied the Arab sulkily. He scowled at Barry. "Did you invent this ridiculous password?" he said.

"No, I didn't, and I think it's as stupid as you do," replied Barry. "Now let's sit down, please. I've not much time to spare." He refrained from informing the man that in the original version of the password, prepared of course by Aranjuez, the man would have had to admit that he was the Chief Eunuch of the King's Bedchamber. The change had been made only at the last moment: "These Moslems are so touchy . . . and, from all I hear, with very little justification," Aranjuez had said.

The pair sat down. The Arab looked about him carefully; but there was no danger. The attendant was still reading his newspaper. The second visitor had moved to another room. The Arab handed Barry a large envelope.

"These are the plans of the house and grounds," he said. "A conservatory has been added since the house was built, but there is no other change."

"Except some barbed wire round the walls, perhaps?" suggested Barry.

"Yes, there is plenty of that, of course."

"What does the guard consist of?"

"Six C.R.S.—*Compagnie Republicaine de Securité*. They are provided from a detachment about a battalion strong, twenty kilometres away, in Aurillac. Changed every second week."

"How are they armed?"

"American carbines and pistols . . . nothing heavy. They sleep and mess on the ground floor. You'll find their quarters marked on the plan. At night there is a single mobile sentry. I can't tell you how often he's changed, but I think it's every two hours."

"I see," said Barry. He examined his companion. He knew

almost every kind of North African, Arab or Berber, from Tunis to Safa, very well, and this one was clearly, and had been for many years, a student . . . Probably a student of medicine, and probably, also, a native of the Marrakech region.

"What I want to know now," he said, "is whether this has ever happened before?"

"How do you mean?" said the Arab.

"Have any of your compatriots escaped, or tried to escape, from forced residence?"

"No. I don't think so." The Arab hesitated. "There was Abd-el-Krim, of course . . ."

"That was rather different," said Barry drily. "Abd-el-Krim got off a boat in Port Said and fled to Cairo. I have to get your man out of Metropolitan France. Has he been informed about this, incidentally?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say?"

The Arab watched the attendant turning a page of his newspaper. "Well, he is old, you know. He considers it to be his duty to escape, but naturally the prospect alarms him."

"Why?"

The Arab smiled. "He has not led an athletic life," he said.

"I am not asking him to lead an athletic life," said Barry. "All he will be required to do, very probably, is to climb a wall by perching on my shoulders, to sit in a car and keep quiet, and finally to walk up a gangway and sit in a boat. I will even provide him with anti-seasick pills."

The Arab looked at him attentively: "You are doing this for money, of course," he said.

"I am doing it because I please," said Barry. "Not for Allah, not for you, not even for the man who pays our salaries. Have you a photograph of your chum? I'd like to see it."

"Yes," said the Arab. He inserted his hand in the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Is he always dressed like this?" said Barry, studying the photograph.

"It is the costume of my country," said the Arab.

"I know that perfectly well, and I was in your country more recently than you," said Barry. "But the white cowl and flowing robes may attract attention as we pass through Marseille, if you'll

permit me to say so." He paused. "I will buy him a suit this afternoon. That beard must come off too, of course."

"The beard is of religious significance," said the Arab. "He will certainly refuse to shave it."

Both men had raised their voices during the last part of this exchange. Now both glanced apprehensively in the direction of the guardian: but the guardian was reading about an *épiciér* in St. Denis who was alleged to have placed hydrochloric acid in the coffee of his wife.

"If I wish your friend to remove his beard, he will remove it," said Barry. He pointed a finger in the direction of the guardian. "You see that man . . .?" he said.

"Yes."

"That man is probably reading about yesterday's traffic accidents. He is wondering why he is never run over himself. Yet people are undoubtedly run over: he reads about it every day. Statistics prove conclusively that many people are run over. We cannot deny that. Do you think *you* may be run over in due course?"

"No," said the Arab.

"I think that you should reconsider that statement," said Barry. "I think that you may be run over very easily, and perhaps not by a motor-car at all, but by me."

"I am not accustomed to being bullied," said the Arab, "I dislike your loud voice and your threats."

"That is because, at the present time, you are in a position to employ neither," said Barry. "Yet I have been shown your dossier in Madrid and in it is some very curious information concerning one of your compatriots who is now no longer with us . . . whereas you are free, in Paris, subjected to no more than a mild police surveillance."

"It is very typical of you Western peoples to betray a man's confidence in this way," said the Arab. "It is very typical of your employers, too, to send a mercenary to help us."

"You are a nice young man," said Barry. "It is even possible that you are brave. Given time, I might have made something of you . . . but unfortunately there is *not* much time just now, and so my variety turn is not perhaps the one I would have chosen but the other, in which you are the little dog who jumps through the paper in the hoops."

"And hits his head against an obstacle the other side, perhaps?" the Arab said.

"Not necessarily," said Barry. He put his hand upon his companion's shoulder, felt and palped the padding. "Would you like to come down there with me?" he said.

"You know I cannot do that," said the Arab.

"Ah . . . why not?"

"I might be followed and bring you into trouble. There is also the question of my . . . of my . . ." He hesitated, looking at Barry sullenly, but did not complete the sentence.

"Of your what?" asked Barry encouragingly.

"Of my race," said the Arab with extraordinary vindictiveness, "or of my skin, if you prefer it that way . . . my skin which is not the same colour as yours, and so might draw attention to me."

"Perhaps you are right," said Barry. He rose. The guardian was still reading the newspaper. Barry walked towards the door. The Arab followed.

"Are you not going to pay me?" he said. "Do you even oblige me to ask you for money?"

"Come round to my hotel at six o'clock this evening," said Barry.

The Arab looked at him wildly. He clenched his fist, and struck a panel of the open door with it: he must certainly have hurt himself. "You are humiliating me," he said, "humiliating me . . . deliberately."

"Not at all," replied Barry. "I don't happen to have enough money on me."

The pair had raised their voices considerably, but perhaps what finally decided the guardian to intervene was the crash of the Arab's fist against the door: an action which could only be construed as a profanation of municipally owned premises. Laying aside his newspaper, the guardian advanced.

"This is a house of art, gentlemen," he said. "A museum, a place of meditation. We cannot have discussions here. There are other places for boxing matches. You must leave the premises."

"We intend to do so . . . and separately," said Barry. He grinned at the Arab. "Good-bye . . . until this evening, then: but don't forget to come before my train leaves."

The Arab clenched his fist. He seemed about to hit the door

again. The guardian intervened. "I know you have no art in your country," he said, "but you must learn to respect art . . . we cannot have such conduct in a place like this."

"Art . . ." said the Arab, "art . . ."

Barry heard no more. The argument, he felt, was one which was likely to continue for a long time. Outside the museum, he surveyed the quiet street. There was no sign of the Spaniard. Smiling, Barry set off on foot, in the direction of the river, consulting his whereabouts from time to time with the aid of a guide book: he had forgotten Paris, but not how best to amuse himself while in that city, which some call that of Light.

* * * *

The woman who opened the door of a fourth-floor flat in the Rue Vaugirard, opposite the Luxembourg, was wearing rather tight black slacks and a grey polo sweater. She was about thirty years old: not beautiful but with rather pleasant grey eyes, a wide mouth and an uptilted nose.

She stared at Barry. Her mouth fell open. This was exactly what her nose needed. Her face assumed an air of engaging juvenility: "It *can't* be . . ." she said.

"But it is," said Barry.

"My God! Come in."

He followed her into the flat, which was small, little more than a studio: observing such things as the unmade bed, the typewriter, the pile of newspaper cuttings on the table, a soup plate containing the discoloured and vinegar-bitten remains of salad.

"Ten years," she said, looking at him. "Ten years." Then she laughed. "I've still got the ring," she said.

"Have you collected any others to put with it?" said Barry.

"Oh no," she said. "I never went in for betrothals again. I gave that up . . . with you."

"I thought you might be married," he said. "I thought maybe you wrote that stuff," he indicated the newspaper cuttings, under your maiden name."

She shook her head. Then she began to walk round him, touching him lightly with her finger. "Have you always kept the moustache," she said, "in spite of what I told you?"

"For a while, I ~~even~~ had a beard as well."

"You never would listen to me, would you?"

"No."

"Well, sit down. Don't stand there *assessing* me as if I were something in an agricultural show."

"I'd give you a great big rosette if you were," said Barry. "Maybe a gold medal, too."

"You've changed . . . changed a lot," she said. "I don't know what it is: it isn't that you're thinner but as if someone had been scooping strips of flesh off your face. You look like Clapham Junction, Barry . . . all criss-cross and sidings."

"It's the bite of the spindrift," he said, "the lash of the sea as the mountainous waves roll by."

"Yes, I've heard about that," she said. "I had a . . . a friend who saw you two years ago, in Tangiers." She stared at him strangely. "Are you happy, Barry?"

"I just breathe and it seems to come," he said.

"And now you'd like some lunch, I suppose? You always were the most *untimely* person that I ever met."

"I was going to ask you to lunch with me."

"Barry, I can't . . . I've got an appointment; really quite a serious one too."

"Put it off." He jerked his head in the direction of the telephone.

"All right," she said. He watched her pick up the receiver, and while she talked, he went out on to the balcony and looked down at the street. Snatches of her conversation reached him. She spoke in French but addressed no one by name. Presently, she called to him:

"What fun . . . are you really going to take me out?"

"Oh yes. Very much so. Right out."

He listened to the water sluicing in the bathroom, while she dressed. She had always whistled, out of tune, when excited. She was whistling now. He thought about her body. As a child she had been wounded by an air-gun pellet fired by her brother: a thin, pink mark above one rib commemorated the incident. When Barry himself had been a boy, a small piece of glass had been made captive within the flesh of his little finger when, in a laboratory, he had tried to push a tube through the unyielding cork of a retort. "*There's nothing there, nothing at all . . . it's gone,*" the doctor had said, as he probed the wound. But there *was*: the wound had healed, but the piece of glass had remained in Barry's finger ever since, had been with him *everywhere*, for over

twenty years. Like the worm outline of the pellet scar above her ribs.

But where . . . *where* . . . how often . . . when and how? Barry stared at the closed door. He listened to her opening cupboard doors, tugging the hooked bill of clothes-hangers along a rail. Her name was Daphne. She could not find the shoes she wanted. One of her shoulders, because she always hunched it when talking, was set a little higher than the other. Her petticoat must by now have slipped a shoulder strap again.

There was a sheet of paper set in the typewriter. Barry began to read it: "*On your first morning in Paris,*" he read, "*get rid of your husband, then make an unhurried window-gazing stroll down the Faubourg Saint-Honoré followed by another along the Rue de Rivoli—the first will give you an idea of what is newest and most charming in accessories; the second will show you what Paris is up to in the matter of inexpensive novelties . . .*"

She came out. "I'm ready," she said. "Where shall we go?"

"We could perhaps take an unhurried stroll, and you could tell me the best place to buy my new girdle," he said.

She laughed: "You've been reading my article."

"Yes. What fun you must have."

"Well, yes . . . strangely enough, I do. I always remind myself of one of those little birds who sit inside the crocodile's jaws and pick . . . pick . . . pick."

"Doesn't the crocodile ever close his jaws?" he asked.

"Good heavens, no: life's just one long yawn for him. Come on: let's go."

She took him to a small restaurant in the Rue de Bourgogne, behind the Chamber of Deputies. They talked about the past; affectionately, without malice, as if it were a play they had seen together many years before, and of which they were now trying to recall the plot.

"I wonder what would have happened if we'd married," he said; then added: "Why did you break it off . . . really?"

"You were too unsafe," she said. "It was like being offered a lovely villa within lava-throw of Etna. You'd have been unfaithful, too, and I wouldn't have liked that . . . not a bit. I'd have whined and nagged, and then you'd have been more unfaithful still, and with reason." She looked at him, her fork raised. "It's that you don't really concede a place in nature for

women," she said. "You think of them as an amusing and recurrent phenomenon, but you can't understand why people should go around the town and through life . . . to the cinema, to the restaurant, and to bed . . . in male and female pairs. When you see a couple kissing it doesn't seem to you natural at all, but as if they were the victims of some giant and universal hoax. Isn't that so?"

"You've become very didactic with the years," he said, smiling, because he liked her, and was amused, and flattered, to be thus analysed.

"No," she replied. "It's just that I rather share your ideas. All women want love, but the only way they can get it is by inflicting one or other of the conventional forms of love upon men. And it doesn't work . . . or very seldom . . . because men won't tolerate it: not for long. If I had my way I'd abolish universal military service and make every man do a two-year spell, instead, either as a free-lance gigolo or in a state brothel with the sexual roles reversed, according to his temperament."

"What a beastly idea," said Barry. "Do you really think that men would submit to it?"

"I'd make them," she said vehemently. "Let men be the pursued, not pursuers, for a while. It would take a great weight off their minds, and everybody would be so much happier when they returned to civilian life."

Barry listened to her talking. He could not have said why, but, suddenly, he felt very sad. As the taste of certain things reminds us, in some peculiar way, of certain smells, so do certain states of feeling produce mental images peculiar to themselves. The five senses are interchangeable: each is so apt to arrogate to itself the role of another that it is not at all surprising that the sound of a woman's voice, a movement of her eyebrows, may remind a man—in some way which he can neither define nor trace to its source—of an event quite foreign to the present, of some occurrence in an improved and more picaresque past.

I must have been ten, thought Barry . . . ten, or eleven. There was a lake in the school grounds. The matron gave us the jam-jars. The whole procedure was quite legal. One was allowed to go down to the lake and there to collect tadpoles. But tadpoles are so dull: it seems to take, for a child, so long for them to make their startling metamorphosis. I forget now why tadpoles were

permitted by authority, whereas the boy who endeavoured to victual a ferret among the cricket gloves and football boots in his games-room locker was inexorably punished. Six strokes, if I remember rightly, and he received them very well . . . whereas I, who was being beaten, concurrently, for some other endless glamorous misdemeanour . . . how odd it is that one forgets what was, at a given moment, a crisis in one's life . . . turned my head at the second stroke, and the master said, with the cane already whirling down towards my striped, be-pyjamaed bottom for the third stroke: "*I'm surprised that you can't take it like a man, Keating.*" The stroke hit: I didn't cry; I merely looked at him. I think he must have seen something in my eyes.

"Have you ever known," the girl was saying, "have you ever known the uselessness of casual encounters?"

"I don't know," he said. "I've forgotten. Shall we put it to the test?"

Later, in her room, with the curtains drawn to hide the grey and noisy town, he watched her, sitting in pyjamas at the table, busy with her work.

"I should have sent this in to-night," she said. "Now, thanks to you, I'll get a rock." She turned to smile at him.

In the lamplight her busy hands were almost golden. Her fingers flicked and danced upon the keys of the typewriter. Half an hour ago, he thought, those fingers were spread wide apart, clamped against my naked shoulders: there is a time for everything.

He lay and looked at her, watched her typing, and he remembered a story he had read somewhere about Lenin. One day, in his years of exile, the great revolutionary had been walking with his wife in the country, and in the distance they had seen a man squatting on the ground and making aimless, disjointed movements with his hands. "*A madman,*" they had thought, but when they came closer they had seen that the man was not mad at all: he was sharpening a knife on a stone.

Barry told this story to the girl, and she laughed. "Yes," she said. "I suppose that if my typewriter was invisible I would look mad, too."

"I wasn't thinking of that," he replied. "I was thinking that we'd both have looked mad if the other had been invisible half an hour ago."

She ceased typing, turned her chair round, and faced him. "Do you really think that?" she said. "It isn't a very nice thing to say."

Barry shrugged. "There are two ways of getting on top of life, of dominating it," he said, "and I like yours best . . . perhaps because it rather resembles my own."

"Ah, yes?" She was hostile, waiting for him to wound her: but to wound was seldom his intention; and least of all at present.

"You give yourself unreservedly . . . imprudently even," he said. "And it isn't really imprudence because when one approaches people openly one generally finds that they have something to give you in exchange."

"You talk as if you were some old buccaneer trading with Indians," she said. "I can keep your glass beads, I suppose, and you take away some of that curious yellow metal to which I attach so little importance."

Barry laughed. "Come here," he said. "Come and tell me what kind of glass the beads were made of."

"No, I won't come there. I think you're hateful. How long have you been like this, anyway?"

"That's more than half the point," he said. "I'm almost never like this; very rarely introspective. You and I can safely leave that to the other kind of people."

"Ah . . . and what are *they* like?"

"You were talking about Indians. Well, the others are the palefaces behind their palisade. If the immediate prospects weren't so frightfully dangerous it would be rather an amusing spectacle to watch the warriors brandishing their tomahawks, and riding round and round . . . almost as amusing as it is to watch people dancing when you can't hear the music."

"Like the man with the knife, perhaps?" she said.

"Yes," he said. "The man with the knife is also in the cast."

She did not conclude her article that afternoon. Sitting in a taxi, on his way back to his hotel, Barry considered the final lines of their six-hour-long dialogue:

"You'll come back," she said.

"Yes, sometimes . . . why not?"

"Ah, yes . . . of course . . . indeed: '*Why not?*' . . . just as you say."

"The real tenderness," he had said, "the kind that you and I can understand, lies in quite small things, in memories wrapped up like

cocoons, hidden in a storehouse at the very back of the head. We bring these memories out, and look at them, when the times grow hard."

"It seems to me that you should read your Gray's *Anatomy* again," she had said. "There is no space at the back of the human head, for your cocoons."

"Oh yes, there is. You're quite mistaken there."

"Come back," she said.

"No . . . you come to me."

"That's impossible."

"All the nice things are," he said.

* * * *

The Spaniard was sitting in the deserted lounge of the hotel when Barry entered. There was an open book upon his knees, a pile of tattered magazines on the floor beside him.

"You want to go to Brittany?" he said.

"Not much," said Barry; "why?"

"When I'd got through all those magazines, and worked out the design on the carpet, and read the rule about no spitting in the bedrooms one or two times, I took up this railway time-table," said the Spaniard. "There's a good local train from Brest to Vannes every morning. Chickens in their coops are carried free, too, on market days. Maybe you didn't know that?"

"No, I didn't," said Barry. He looked at the Spaniard. "Did a man call here for me?" he said.

"You have to pay for dogs, though," said the Spaniard. "Dogs and goats." Yes," he said, "a man called here to see you about an hour ago."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No, *amigo*: I don't speak to men: I just follow them . . . except when I'm waiting for them."

"You're so tough," said Barry, "that maybe it might do you good to live with me a few days. What do you think?"

"I think you've been with a woman," said the Spaniard. "You've got some of her powder on your cuff, too. Some of these girls are a regular snowstorm, aren't they?"

"What did you do when this man came?" said Barry.

"I went behind that plant over there," said the Spaniard. He jerked his thumb towards it. "These ignorant French probably

think that's a palm tree . . . but you and I know better, don't we?"

"And why did you do that?" said Barry.

"I wasn't brought up like you rich kids. I was taught to be heard, once or twice, when it mattered . . . but on no account to be seen."

"You're all right," said Barry. "You just don't like to say so. That's why it's no use you twisting your mouth around like that. You still look quite all right, just the same."

"An educated man like you," said the Spaniard, "could maybe tell me how long it takes a dwarf palm tree to die of cold and a diet of Virginian cigarette smoke?"

"Not long," said Barry. "Shall we buy them another before we leave?"

"Are we leaving?"

"Very well," said Barry. "What is it you want? Shall I turn a somersault: will you let me be the boss, then? I don't mind the other way, mind you, but if we don't get a sleeper and have to sit up all night you might have to hide your face in the window curtains . . . otherwise, the other people in the carriage will think you are a boxer who had a fight a bit above his class."

"Shall we go upstairs?" said the Spaniard. "I left your money there."

"All right," said Barry. He paused for a moment at the desk to say something to the clerk, who appeared to expostulate: then he joined his companion in the lift. Barry's room was on the fourth floor. The lift rose with wheezy dignity. For two floors Barry said nothing. Then,

"I bought your palm tree," he said. "They're packing it now with a sack around the roots. We'll plant it where we're going, if you like. In the sun it will live."

"Give me your sleeve," said the Spaniard.

"Why?"

"You don't want to walk around with woman all over you, do you?"

In his room, Barry took up the telephone. With his free hand he fumbled in the despatch case for money. He handed the Spaniard some notes.

"That man will come back presently," he said. "He'll be shown up here. You will meet him in the passage, and give him this

money. Anything that happens one second later is your affair."

"There are several chemists quite near," said the Spaniard. "I noticed them when I came in . . . I thought at the time they might be useful in another connection." He grinned at Barry.

Barry grinned, too. The switchboard operator came on the telephone. He asked her to wait, then covered the mouthpiece with his hand. "What's your name?" he said, "or would you get more fun out of life if I called you 'X'?"

"You can call me Mariano," said the Spaniard. "My mother used to do it all day long."

Barry considered him carefully for a moment. "I think you'll find that this is going to be quite amusing," he said.

"I'm beginning to think that way, too," said the Spaniard.

"Just do what other people say," said Barry, "but the little satisfactions of work well done we keep for ourselves. Do I make myself clear?"

"They must have given you a very good education indeed," said the Spaniard.

And the switchboard operator, angry at the delay, filled the ear-piece of the telephone with the soft burr of sepulchral protest.

Eleven

IN THE GREAT GOLDEN *salon* of the fashion house, in a décor which confused, with admirable virtuosity, the *fin* of several *siècles* . . . in the presence of more than ninety people, including representatives of the Press, and foreign buyers—the showing of the spring collection was now nearly at an end. At the door, their manner genial, their glance peripatetic, stood the three Belen brothers, who were seldom seen together except upon these occasions of joint fraternal grandeur. Beside them, resplendent like themselves in a cutaway coat and pepper-and-salt-trousers, a sheaf of papers in his hand, stood Ceferino: his duty to announce the name of each dress as the model entered, and performed her circuit.

Before the ceremony, the chairs had been set along all four walls of the room, thus eliminating tedious questions of precedence.

By this prudent arrangement, if some guests were less well placed than others then this was merely because they had arrived too late—and, in consequence, too rudely—to obtain more favoured points of vantage. None, not even the greatest, could justifiably make complaint: nor did any dare to do so.

"*Cisneros*," announced Ceferino in a voice which, without being clamorous, could be heard in the most distant corner of the room. He was referring, at one and the same time, to the remarkable Spanish Cardinal; the first to compile the monumental Complutensian Bible; with texts in Hebrew, Greek and Chaldean . . . and the summer dress in yellow shantung worn by Angéles as she swept past him, stepping neatly on his toe, into the arena.

For, on this occasion, disdaining horticulture, the fine arts and those meteorological euphemisms which habitually provide the name of women's fashions, the Belen brothers had decided to honour, instead, their country's sixteenth and most distinguished of Christian centuries; and even now several North American ladies, longnettes in hand, were learning from their glossy catalogues that the mauve summer travelling suit presented a few moments before by the mannequin Dominique bore the name of Sanchez Ciruelo, a writer very popular in his day, who published several masterly polemics against judicial astrology, and who, indeed, did much to diminish that accursed superstition in Europe.

"*Cisneros*," repeated Ceferino, amid a respectful silence, to which everyone concurred. In the small cubicles across the deserted entrance floor, the four mannequins were busy changing clothes. There were no doors between these cubicles: in consequence, Mercedes, the dresser, was able to pass from one girl to another, now tugging a corsage into position, now coaxing with deft fingers at a recalcitrant button. Seen in the mirrors which flanked each wall, and even the ceilings, the effect was piscine, as of an aquarium: a white body, previously immobile, would suddenly flash into sinuous activity as one dress was put aside, another passed above cascading hair, while waists . . . and haunches wriggled.

And the air—oh, that fetid air—a dozen perfumes mingled with, but did not mask, the odour of half-naked bodies engaged in intense and continuous physical exercise; while through that same air ran the sound waves of curses which would have done honour to an army barrack-room upon inspection day; their pretext the

loss of a shoe, a laddered stocking, or a finger lacerated by a hook.

Her face set—although she did not know it—in the disdainful smile with which she had made each of her several appearances before the public, Dominique stood still while Mercédes smoothed and tugged at unseen portions of the wedding dress in which, as soon as Angéles returned, she would make her final and most important entrance. The wedding dress had no name, nor did it need one: its presentation would close the show, draw from the male spectators no more perhaps than a wry smile and secret thoughts of marriage beds—but from the throat of every woman would come that sigh, in some cases reminiscent, in others anticipatory, in still others melancholy, but in every instance deep with pathos and an awareness of Eve's inflexible destiny.

"Are you ready?" said Francisco Belen, appearing in the doorway. He, too, wore the same fixed smile, though in his case the smile was ingratifying, not disdainful. His hands twitched nervously, would not leave his tie alone. That the show was a social success there could be no doubt, but he would not know until this evening, when the American buyers—hard-faced, glossy men who would be off to Paris or Milan in the morning—passed their orders, whether material reward, too, awaited him.

"Are you ready?" With the indifference of a pastrycook who has made too many cream puffs to be interested, personally, in their consumption, Francisco examined the wriggling bodies of the mannequins.

"I have told you before, Marina," he said coldly to a young woman who was attempting to hit another with a shoe over the question of a mislaid stocking, "I have told you before that if you must become involved with lovers who scratch your back, I will cease to allow you to wear evening dress. There were giggles, not murmurs of appreciation, when you entered the *salon*."

The girl said nothing: she was well aware that Belen would not carry out this threat because her shoulders were the best available, to him, in Barcelona. And besides, it was not by one of her many lovers that she was about to be scratched now, but by the colleague whom she had just hit sharply on the ankle with the heel of a shoe.

There is also a talcum powder which covers scratches and even bites.

"Come . . . let us leave this menagerie," said Belen. He

pushed Dominique before him while Mercédes, as if dragged in their train by some magnetic force, followed almost to the entrance of the *salon*, murmuring soft protests, like a cat whose kitten has been abducted, smoothing a last pleat; and when she could go no further without being seen by the inquisitive public, wishing her charge godspeed.

The request made of the Almighty proved unnecessary. Murmurs of spontaneous appreciation greeted Dominique's appearance; these murmurs diminishing and finally giving place to silence as the desire of each spectator to show himself sophisticated and emotionally invulnerable came into play.

"*La Novia*," announced Ceferino.

It was certainly a most beautiful dress, but possibly the very limitations and the totemic undertones of the function to which it was dedicated had handicapped its creator. In Catholic countries, at least, all wedding dresses must be white because all brides are, supposedly, virginal. Belen had thought of calling the dress either '*The Bride of the Cid*' or '*Ophelia*', and had only been restrained from this intention when reminded of the unfortunate fate of both those noble ladies.

Swish . . . swish . . . the long, dancing whisper of falling muslin, the sharp tap and slide of a shoe as the mannequin turned. Dominique's movements were extraordinarily graceful; the more so because, without being heavy, she was yet big of bone, broad of chest, and so her finesse and the delicacy of each turn impressed the spectators more deeply than would have the manoeuvres of a more wispy woman.

"*La Novia!*" thought Fife, who had obtained a ticket for the show from his mistress, Pilar, a friend of Angéles. "*La Novia!*" Fife endeavoured to think, with a cynicism suitable to the occasion, that it was somewhat ironical, a fit illustration of the present state of society, that to wear a wedding dress the mother of a child aged two, separated from her husband, should have been chosen . . . but Fife could not think along those lines with any great conviction although his face, as seen by his neighbours, may have suggested the contrary . . . and the reason for this was that Dominique's new accessibility was not, as he had supposed it would be, a relief to Fife, but, instead, the source of new torment . . . and inevitably, since his mistress had divined the insurgent turmoil of his heart, of more than usual domestic squabbles.

"Go there, then," Pilar had said to him, finally. "Sit and stare like an old woman, waiting for confession, stares at the cross. You'll never get her: you don't *want* to get her, really. She's your compensation, your way of getting out of what you've done to me."

At the end of the *salon*, Dominique turned, about to begin her second round . . . the round during which those spectators who desired to do so might ask her to approach, so that they might touch and test the texture of her dress, and during which time Belen, watching from the doorway, would think rapidly, deciding whether the occasion was worthy of his personal intervention.

Far up the line of faces seen in profile, Fife saw, not for the first time, that of Freddy Cherr . . . a dark profile, as classical in outline as that of some Roman seen upon a coin, and, like that Roman's head, blurred with time and by elements inimical to its preservation; yet still noble. With Freddy Cherr, who had long since perceived the nature of his torment, Fife was not upon the best of terms, and now, although he had exchanged several smiles with her, he knew that Freddy, if she considered the joke of sufficient interest—which, of course, was not certain—might inform other members of the British colony, to the detriment of his prestige . . . might inform them, with who know what virulence of commentary, of his presence here this afternoon.

Fife looked at Paco Llañaneras, at a young woman sitting immediately opposite to Paco—and this, no doubt, because she had chosen that place deliberately. He knew this young woman to have been Paco's fiancée until recent events had put an end to that tedious idyll, but none the less eminently sensible project of marriage; so convenient for two large commercial families. Next to this young woman, and engaged with her in a lively, low-voiced and undoubtedly malicious conversation, sat José Beltran, a man who, to Fife, was as ubiquitous as he was intolerable . . . because, condemned to death himself, Beltran had made of himself the barometer and the rain-gauge of others, so that, as practice pronounced him perfect as a semi-male Cassandra in search of calamity, so could he now guess with exactitude the millimetric volume of the rain which fell in each tormented life, of the diminution of barometric pressure which announced the coming storm.

And it was at this moment that an incident occurred which was

noted—indeed, could not have been other than noted—by all present, because clearly audible in a room enjoying enviable acoustic properties. This incident provided Fife with a clear insight into Dominique's present state of mind, into the condition of her nerves, and the muted impulses of her heart.

For, halting unasked in front of a woman whom Fife, with his extensive, almost encyclopædic knowledge of the *habituées* of Barcelona night-clubs now recognised as Nuria Herédia, and whom Fife himself had seen only the previous week in the company of Thornton, in a cinema, Dominique, placing her hands upon her hips, in an attitude quite at variance with the maidenly requirements of her wedding dress, said in a clear voice, which all could hear:

"I am not a public entertainer, and I want none of my husband's bitches here. Please leave this room."

In the confusion which immediately ensued—a confusion during which Nuria did, in fact, leave the room with considerable, although perhaps a too tangible, dignity—two of the three Belens sprang forward, their faces haggard with apprehension, as are those of men who know there is no possibility of putting on a gramophone record or suggesting some new party game with which to drown a rising scandal.

Dominique, apparently quite unperturbed, continued her circuit and finally, with the sketch of a curtsy, made her exit in a manner quite as effective as that of her recent opponent. The Belens, baulked by her self-possession of the reproof which they would have preferred to administer in public, hesitated, and by that hesitation were lost; for now the laughter of the crowd, anxious for further amusement, engulfed them, together with invitations, some of them phrased most offensively, to take a turn upon the floor themselves so that the audience might see how it should really be done.

With flushed faces, the two Belens left the *salon*. Excited voices could be heard in the passage outside. The crowd, knowing that the spectacle was over, dispersed into groups; to discuss both the show and the scene which had made the show memorable. One of the American ladies could be heard quite distinctly demanding an interview with Dominique: a short biographical sketch of whom would interest, she announced, the readers of the important magazine which she represented.

Fife joined Freddy Cherr.

"Did you hear that?" he said.

"My dear, it was so clear I think God must have heard it," said Freddy.

"She must have rehearsed it," said Fife. "She was in here three times before with those sports clothes. Yes, she must have been thinking about it for over an hour . . . ever since she saw that woman come in."

For the Rocky Mountains are just rocks to some people.

"One's only young once," said Freddy Cherr. "You'll find that out when you have some children." She looked at Fife curiously. "I can't imagine any other way you could find it out," she said.

"But she'll lose her job," said Fife.

"Only people like you and that young man I saw running out after her in a panic could think anything so stupid as that," said Freddy. "I think she'll be offered a rise in salary."

Dominique was not offered a rise in salary, but her prestige, which, owing to her anomalous marital situation, had stood for several weeks, among what passed, in her mind, for polite society, in great need of some such boost, now became inflated to the point where it could be described as a contemporary legend. The wives and women of puissant textile manufacturers who, under normal circumstances, would never have set foot in the Belen establishment except possibly to buy some beach wear or a bathing suit—so greatly was their own prestige dependent upon dress-designers' labels with a Paris mark—now visited the place daily, and in considerable numbers: and such is the forthright frankness of the Catalan character that many of these ladies asked to be shown the mannequin who, while wearing a wedding dress, had insulted a woman of their race.

And, of course, the most curious thing was this: that it was less the personalities of the two protagonists involved in the scene, though these were admittedly interesting, than the fact of the wedding dress itself, the hymeneal symbol, which gave rise to so much discussion, and even, eventually, to a discreet comment in a weekly, and reputedly humorous, paper.

These first weeks, these first months which she was, during their course, to describe with sad but undeniable pride to her

father as her period of '*residence surveillée*' were what is known among people who are given to tags—though not always to fortitude—as a 'testing time' for Dominique.

If statistics prove that men do, indeed, die younger than women, that they are more subject to a painful end, and in greater numbers, as victims of the respiratory and cardiac diseases of middle life, more prone to the various carcinomas, then this is surely no less than rudimentary justice; for to how many fewer moral hazards are men exposed, to how fewer and less pitiful dilemmas, than women?

In matters where Fate takes a hand, that sombre agent of destruction will seldom abandon the venture, seldom lay the cards aside, give place to a less reckless and more ordered player, until flush upon royal flush have reduced his opponents to the silent role of puppets.

Having become the mistress of Paco Llawaneras four days after her separation from her husband, Dominique discovered, some weeks later, that she was beyond all possibility of doubt pregnant, and that she could never know with any certainty who was the father of her child.

This situation was the more calamitous for Dominique because she stood in great need of comfort and the less exuberantly physical kindnesses. But Paco was going through a period of euphoria consequent upon a triumph by far too long delayed, and now appeared to think—when he did consider such minor matters—that *marrons glacés* and a daily bunch of tulips represented the other essential elements of feminine security and happiness.

Women with their back against the doctor's door are invariably practical, and Dominique, having rejected the idea of a confession of her state to Paco, as some fruit farmer might have done the mention of hard frost, decided that she could not perhaps do better than approach her husband—this not so much because she considered Thornton to be an expert in such questions, or to be closely in touch with persons who might be so, as because she knew that she could move him deeply by an announcement of her situation: and from several points of view it had now become desirable for her to clarify her relations with Thornton in order that there should be no further misapprehension of any kind, such as the instance—one recently brought to her attention by a

well-disposed person—in which her husband had declared to someone at a dinner party, who wished to know his exact civic situation, that he was a widower, and the father of one child.

In pursuit of her intention to seek what she considered to be a final and definitive interview, Dominique left her flat one afternoon, and was about to cross the frontier—the Calle Balmes—and to enter Thornton's territory, when Fate, having dealt the first card, so neatly intervened with a second ace.

As Dominique halted on the pavement, waiting for the traffic lights to change, she saw Thornton on the side of the street, wearing (it was this small and unaccustomed detail which shocked her most) a hat, and accompanied by Barbara.

Thornton did not see his wife, and probably would have passed by unaware, had not Barbara tugged excitedly at his arm, pointed, and said—her stepmother heard the words quite clearly:

"Oh, look . . . there's *Dominique*." Not '*Maman*' but the Christian name, and this uttered quite spontaneously, and apparently without premeditation.

As soon as the traffic lights changed colour, Dominique crossed the street.

"Why are you wearing that hat?" she said.

"I bought it," said Thornton.

"It doesn't suit you. Where are you going? Why isn't Barbara at school?"

"I'm taking her back there now. I thought I'd give her lunch at home. It's her birthday."

"Oh . . ." Dominique looked at Barbara, who was staring at her with sombre disapproval. "May I walk down with you?" she said.

"Certainly," answered Thornton politely. Although neatly dressed, appearing clean, he had, she thought, his most reckless and inwardly scruffy look about him. She examined his eyes: they were of course bloodshot, and one of them twitched repeatedly. "Go on ahead, Barbara," she heard him say. "I want to talk to Maman."

"To Dominique, you mean, don't you?" said Barbara. Only the very young can achieve, and sustain, that annihilating tone of voice.

"No. I mean *Maman*. Please do as I say." He propelled the child forward. Barbara didn't mind: she knew that she could be a

far greater nuisance five yards ahead than at their side. She trailed her shoes, hoping that the seams would miraculously burst, thus obliging her father to perform first aid. But the seams held: therefore Barbara began to swing her school satchel about, dangerously, in the path of other people. But still no admonition came from behind. She looked back, hating both of them intensely. They were deep in conversation.

"They're worse that way than in the bed," she thought.

"I'm sorry about the birthday," Dominique was saying.

"That's all right," he said. "I bought her a present from you."

"Why did you do that, Desmond?"

"I don't know. It made an extra present, after all." She watched him blush. "*Help me,*" she said to him with her eyes, "*help me.*"

"Is Dominique going back to France to-day?" said Barbara from her commanding position, ahead of them.

"Stop talking and barging into people," said Thornton authoritatively. He looked at his wife. "If you want to consult me about something," he said, "we'd perhaps better leave this pest at her school first."

And so that is what they did; but Barbara refused to kiss Dominique, and once safe within the school gates, she spat.

"Have you been putting her against me?" said Dominique.

"No. Quite the contrary."

"Then in that case she must be having great fun. All the antagonism, bottled-up for years, can now come out quite freely."

"What do you want to tell me, Dommy?" he said gently. They stood in the street, exchanging trivial dialogue, two-line obituaries upon a love which neither had wished to lose.

"Nothing . . . not any more," said Dominique, decisively.

"But you did want to tell me something, though?"

"Not any more." She put her hand on his arm. "Do you realise what you look like?" she said. "Oh, Desmond, how can you keep on doing this to yourself?"

"Perhaps because I don't have to keep looking into mirrors, professionally," he said. "Have you looked into yours lately, by the way? The hard-boiled-egg colour beneath the eyes tell me something I never wished to know."

Dominique made no reply: there was no reply to be made to

that type of remark. She walked away from him. She saw, in the mirror of a garage, that he shivered, began as if to follow her, then clenched his fists, and restrained himself.

"Ring up Freddy Cherr," he called after her. He could have, should have, run, have seized her hand, and spoken words of love and hope to her, but he did nothing. He turned, entered a bar; perhaps deliberately, so that she should see him do it.

* * * *

The same evening, having sent Paco away, having waited for Pepita to go to bed, Dominique emerged from her flat, in a dressing-gown, and jumped eleven steps down the dark staircase, landing with a dreadful, sickening thud, upon stone, in bedroom slippers.

She had decided that, if this thing must be done, it must be done by herself alone.

Dominique jumped four times, and on the last occasion, her strength failing, she did not clear the final step but, instead, tripped upon it and, plunging forward, cut her head most painfully, upon the latch of a window on the half-landing.

Fortunately, this cut lay in her hair, and would therefore be invisible when she went to work tomorrow.

Dominique proceeded upstairs again, washed the wound with care in the bathroom, drank a glass of milk, and then, seeing upon the balcony a step-ladder left there by painters sent by Paco to redecorate the flat, she mounted it, and jumped from the top step a further three times; the first two times upon the stone; the third, since she could endure no more, into the sandpit of her daughter, Geneviève.

Not one of these gymnastic exercises having produced so much as a tremor in that part of her body which she was attempting to mortify, Dominique ran herself a hot bath and, proceeding cautiously to the kitchen, so that she would not wake Pepita, heated for herself there—for use in the bath—sufficient vinegar, and three spoonfuls of sugar, to achieve, if swallowed hot and ardent, her purpose.

At four o'clock in the morning, frightful pains began in Dominique's stomach. She turned her face to the wall, raised her head, and clutched the plaster, endeavouring to be silent.

Pepita, however, long awake—awakened, indeed, by the thuds

of feet upon the staircase—now rose from her bed, considering that the time had come to bring succour to her mistress. From a pot in the kitchen she took two dried bay leaves and an onion.

"Put those on your stomach," she said. "I have a knife here, and will slice up the onion."

"Go away, Pepita. . . . Get Geneviève up, and put her on her pot."

"But I love you, Señorita Dommy! you are a brave woman." She hesitated, blushed as deep down as her neck, then added: "It is the onion that you need. In my *pueblo* it is always onion in such cases."

"So you know, too . . . even you?" said Dominique. She did not know what she was saying: if she had known she would probably not have said this.

"I only know that you are a brave and good woman, and that I would give my life for you," said Pepita.

"I am a brave and good woman, to you?" said Dominique (she had not believed that Pepita could think such utter nonsense). "Well, that is always something gained," she said.

She slept a little; then the pains began again: and now they were more searching:

"It isn't right . . . it isn't right," she thought.

At six o'clock in the morning she stood looking at her face in the bathroom mirror. Then she lifted her unsteady hand, and reached for a pendant piece of porcelain.

She tugged. An unborn life was at an end, and a message would be marked in fire and pain, henceforth, across all of her endeavours.

The next day was the day of the fashion show at Belen's . . . and so, perhaps, it was scarcely surprising that Dominique should have spoken to a childless woman there in an uncompromising manner.

* * *

What was Dominique's day? How did she live? Was she happy?

Perhaps not altogether happy, but then, too, very seldom sad, although the black gloom did sometimes enfold her, and at those moments Paco, observant of her slightest change of mood, would look at her and say: "*You need a tonic,*" or, if it were past the

chemist's closing time: "*Let's go far away to-night. Let's drive until the petrol runs out. I've two spare tins in the back of the car, so we can always get back to Barcelona before dawn.*"

He had taken her, on these night excursions, as far afield as Vich and Lerida. He had also taught her to drive, and she drove well, though on the first night there was trouble, and they were obliged to change seats quickly, when a country policeman, waving a red and agitated lantern brought them to a halt, convinced that he was dealing with kidnappers or bank robbers.

One Sunday, at her instance, they drove to Calafell, where she had spent the previous summer. There was a restaurant beside the long, flat, golden beach a mile or two beyond the little town. The proprietor of this restaurant remembered Dominique, as well he might, for upon his outdoor *piste*, slimy now with lichen and the rain of winter, she had created something of a sensation by refusing to dance a tango with a popular footballer.

The proprietor of this restaurant examined Paco attentively; his air at once respectful, and slightly ironic. The proprietor could not remember, with any clarity of detail, what the husband had been like, but he remembered what he now perceived to have been a characteristic detail: the man had knocked him up at three o'clock one morning and demanded, with smooth menace, beer; as if the hour had been that of midday.

The proprietor served the pair with tepid Martinis made according to a formula in a recipe book of which he had recently become the purchaser. He put a tango on his radiogram, and watched them dance, warning them beforehand about the lichen.

He also watched the child, who accompanied them, digging with intent face and pudgy hands at monticules of sand upon the beach. All beaches were the same to children, he supposed: but he did wonder in which photograph album the pictures which the two adults were taking with their splendid Leica would find glue, and a final resting place.

At home, Dominique rose, each morning of the working week, at ten-past ten. Her bed was small, the mattress lumpy, but both bed and mattress were her own: the first bed which had been truly hers—narrow, single, celibate—since she had left home for marriage four long years before.

And it was because of this bed, and her desire to retain the

exclusive use of it, that Dominique refused—except upon those rare occasions when wine, or some coterie Sunday success in riding at the polo club made him urgent to her—that Dominique refused to admit Paco to the secret of its narrow corrugations.

So that he was obliged to bargain with a cousin, and to pay heavily for the privilege of set times overlooking railway sidings.

“We shall be coming after dinner, if you don’t mind.”

“Can’t you go to a house, *hombre?*” the cousin would reply. “God knows, there are enough of them. I shall be coming back myself at twelve.”

Yes, at ten-past ten rose Dominique, played with her child for twenty minutes, then washed, and bathed, and made the beauty which, with slight rearrangements, must endure until night fell.

A quiet and, it seemed, preoccupied Pepita brought coffee, ran the bath. There had been awkward moments with Pepita, as, for example, upon the evening when Paco first came to dinner. Then the service had been slovenly and surly, and the sole—Dominique’s especial pride—burnt black upon its underside, where it kissed the tepid surface of the plate.

Dominique had made no direct comment, either then or later, but next morning, when Pepita, making the next move in her offensive, had enquired, with every fitting air of innocence and while stirring sugar in her lady’s coffee, whether it were in fact true—a proposition that she had seen expounded pictorially in a comic magazine—that men were no more than the artful descendants of apes, Dominique, perfectly aware of the implication intended, had replied:

“I’m sure I don’t know, Pepita, but when you’ve learnt to read, you may perhaps discover for yourself.”

On Tuesdays, Thursdays, in the afternoon, and on Sundays in the morning, while Pepita was absent for half an hour at Mass, Thornton, by the terms of an arrangement approved by his wife, met his younger daughter and her nursemaid on a triangular piece of gravel, enlivened by green benches and dead flower beds, on the Plaza Molina.

He came alone, approaching cautiously along a street at that time in a state of excavation, a street dedicated to the memory of William (Guillermo, in this setting) Tell. As he passed between the cement mixers and flinched aside from the workman’s heaving

pick, Thornton—Pepita could perceive this clearly—peered, endeavouring to pick out from the many multicoloured little figures the child whom he had begotten in a distant night; perhaps even in the early morning, when dew lay on the ground, beyond the window . . . not far distant from the bed.

“Hullo, Genny,” he would say, and that first greeting never varied.

Then he, who was in so many things so crass, so full of hurt for all around him, would show a surprising delicacy of feeling, and noting that the other maids, nurses, and the occasional grand-mamas were watching him intently, and that he was here for but a short time, whereas Pepita must adorn the site each afternoon, he drew her apart, behind the kiosk of the San Gervasio Métro Station.

“Papa,” would say Genny, at intervals of approximately half a minute, “Papa.”

But there are few games which one can play in the middle of a noisy city on a cold and hostile afternoon, so that it usually ended by his crossing the street towards a smart, important shop, and in there—explaining quite unnecessarily that they were for a little girl—buying *bonbons* for his daughter.

If there is a sweet in their mouth, with all the sensory paradise of suck and bite and munch, little girls will sit on anybody’s knee; and so it was with him and her; with Pepita wandering two yards away . . . and watching.

Though, once or twice, the routine varied: hailing a taxi with an air of resolution belied by his indecisive, flapping hand, he would take them to the Zoo—where Genny demanded instantly to see the pelicans—and he would never have sufficient place in pocket for all the crinkling packets of her peanuts.

Or else he would take them both to buy Genny clothes, in small shops where the assistants would look at him with that humorous feminine tolerance of which fathers benefit upon such occasions.

“Is this big enough for her, Pepita?”

“Buy the bigger size, señor. She will wear it longer.”

“Do you mean anything especial by that remark, Pepita?” He did not speak harshly: he was only puzzled.

“It is not for me to mean things, señor.”

“How is your *noyio*, Pepita?”

“I don’t want to talk of *novios*, just now, Señor Thornton.”

And it so happened that, three months later, Pepita, asking for the holiday long due to her, took Paco's money from her employer's hand, went to her native village near Jaén, did not return, broke with her *novio*, and married a rich widower who smelt strongly of eau-de-Cologne because he had found it inadvisable to smell of nature.

But that, alas, is quite another story. In this one, the day came when Thornton did not appear at the appointed meeting place, on the Plaza Molina. Nor had rain fallen, nor did rain threaten: at least, not there.

Next morning, Dominique telephoned to him . . . *ting-a-ling* . . . *ting-a-ling*, across a bare half mile of space, and two lives. "Hullo."

"*Aquí Thornton.*"

"Why do you say '*Aquí Thornton*' like that, Desmond, as if you were a time signal? Is that your new maid who answered first? She sounds extremely disagreeable. Do you think you could teach her not to say '*Qué hay*' when she answers, as if it were a man illegally entering her bedroom?"

"I will pass your observation on to her."

"I doubt it: you were always terrified of ~~the~~ maids," said Dominique.

It is of sociological interest to note that the positions of the parties to this telephonic exchange were the following: Thornton was standing upright in a passage while his coffee grew cold; Dominique was lying in bed and warming her toes among the hot curls at the nape of her daughter's neck. Thornton made no reply to her last remark. So:

"Why didn't you come yesterday, Desmond?"

"I can't come any more."

"Why not?"

"I just can't come any more."

"Oh, very well. I suppose the inconvenience to Pepita means nothing to you? But you might at least send me some money."

Dominique rang off.

She did not want any money. She had sneered politically to mark a point at closing time, in fact, much as in sea-fights before the coming of ironclads, two old wooden tubs, heavy with cannon and impressed men, would manœuvre for the windward edge of fate.

Insufficient attention is paid, in many novels, to questions of finance. Even the sublime giant, Dostoevsky, was occasionally at fault in this connection: he portrays, with a mastery which none can hope to imitate, not only every passion to which mankind is subject but also the squalor and the emotional effects of extreme poverty. Yet the reader never learns the details of a single grocer's bill, and to the last must wonder whether the immoral earnings of Sonia were sufficient to provide her father, Marmeladov, with enough money for the flood of vodka with which he brought destruction on his family.

Can there have been a still in the house, of which the writer makes no mention?

A grocer's bill may make dull reading, but there are moments when a study of it, and of such questions as the grocer's attitude towards credit facilities, for example, may prove illuminating . . . and since in life, too often, women are men's negroes, creatures to be eyed with a Mason-Dixon squint in trains; and, elsewhere, often subject to attempts at purchase, then perhaps no harm will be done by reference to Dominique's financial circumstances, since it was upon these, in the last resort, that much depended.

On leaving her husband, Dominique had received from him the equivalent of one hundred pounds, sufficient extra money to pay the rent of her flat for two months, and the undertaking that Thornton would provide a further twenty-five pounds each month; this last sum ostensibly destined for the upkeep of their daughter.

Within six weeks none of her capital of one hundred pounds remained to Dominique; and this not so much because of any genuine extravagance upon her part as because the needs of her professional life required a far greater expenditure upon clothes, hairdressers, and cosmetic products than any to which she had hitherto been accustomed. Thus, a situation very rapidly arose in which, had it not been for her husband's—or, more exactly, her daughter's—money, Dominique would have been unable to live at all, and indeed, even with that money, could barely scrape along.

In Spain, as Angéles had reminded her on several occasions, women are "in truth" maintained in economic servitude. Dominique's income from Belen's was exactly fourteen pounds a

month, that is to say, six pounds less than the rent of her flat alone—this leaving aside all such questions of essential expenditure as food, heat and light, transport and the retention of a domestic servant. Of course, Dominique could have taken a flat in a less fashionable part of the town, but even there the rent would have remained considerable because she would still have been obliged to contract for a furnished home.

As soon as the hundred pounds had gone—and it went not only upon clothes but on such things as new window curtains, a radio, and toys for her child—the situation, as portrayed upon several of the innumerable pieces of paper of which Dominique's handbag was full, and on which she recorded her monetary problems, was the following:

		£			£
<i>Income</i>	For Geneviève	25	<i>Expenditure</i>	Rent	20
	From Belen	14		Food, light, etc.	15
				Pepita	5
		<hr/>			<hr/>
		39			40

Obviously something had to go; and the first two things to go were that Dominique ceased to eat at home, and that Pepita was no longer paid her very modest wages.

But even mannequins, obliged to pursue dietary restrictions in order to preserve their figures, must eat sometimes, and if they do not eat at home then they must eat out, and if they eat out, then somebody must pay for their meal; and if too many people, inscribed like patients on a doctor's panel, are prepared to pay, and are seen to pay for such meals, then their guest may earn an unenviable and quite undeserved reputation for fickleness, or worse, quite apart from the fact that it is in the nature of men who pay for ladies' meals to do so because they are already, or will be by the time the coffee comes, romantically or erotically interested in their companion; and this may in its turn give rise to jealousy, to scenes of reproach, to as much general unhappiness as if everybody had stayed at home and eaten slices of dry bread.

Then, again, the scheme of society is such that many of the nicer restaurants—and certainly those most favoured by the young—possess other than purely gastronomic attractions, such as dancing, a cabaret, and old ladies who appear at half-hour

intervals with trays of roses and even more exotic flowers, and these amenities, together with the champagne which is their natural accompaniment, must be paid for, lest the host seem churlish and ignorant of polite usage in such places.

Furthermore, and to resume the domestic note, mothers who work all day and come home only very late at night are unlikely to see much of their children, except on Sundays; and not even then if their favourite relaxation is of an outdoor nature, engaged upon in the company of adults, where children are not welcome. Dominique seldom saw Geneviève now except asleep, and the only task which she could then perform for her daughter was to rearrange the bedclothes, cover the small, exposed buttocks with a sheet, and kiss the fist that lay clenched by dreams of toys and curious, gigantic adults, upon the pillow.

At first, although he had become her lover and was satisfactory to her in that respect, Paco represented no more to Dominique than one of the many elements of her new liberty. He was amusing, devoted, a good friend and, to her somewhat piqued surprise, quite devoid, or so it seemed to be, of jealousy.

But when one evening, in Paco's absence, and perhaps to stimulate that jealousy—he was sometimes sent by his father to Lerida, where the family owned a factory—she accepted an invitation to dine with young Juan Gili, who had been attentive to her for many months on her visits to the riding club, she discovered that life was by no means as simple as she had imagined.

Not that she was unable to cope with the rather elephantine assiduities of her companion—these were merely amusing; but later, when they went on to dance at a night-club, *Rigat*, where she had been seen frequently with Paco, an incident occurred which she interpreted, correctly, as a danger signal.

A few tables distant from her own was seated a hilarious party consisting of four men, two mannequins well known to Dominique, although employed by another house, and a third woman whom she had never seen before, and whose appearance, by its garishness, displeased her.

Presently, one of the mannequins rose and, addressing herself directly to Dominique, without any attempt whatever to distract Gili's attention and apparently indifferent to his presence, said:

"Darling, do come and join us. The one with the bald head and the moustache is mad about you."

"Go away," said Dominique.

"But, darling, he owns an entire steamship line."

"Then let him use it to transport you somewhere," said Dominique.

But, all the same, she was worried, and as the weeks passed the causes for her worry did not diminish. She took the hint implicit in the mannequin's approach to her and henceforth did not go out with anyone save Paco; nor was this any great hardship to her, for she was not vain, and she received quite sufficient flattery and adulation in her professional hours of business to be able to dispense with the necessity of it in varied *tête-à-têtes*.

No. What disturbed Dominique was the general insecurity of her position, and its equivocal nature. It was all very well to declare oneself independent, and perhaps in her own country, and in spite of the exiguity of her financial means, she might have been able to achieve that independence. But here, in Spain, it was not possible: the very decision by which, in refusing to be seen abroad in the town with any other man than Paco, she avoided gossip concerning her possible promiscuity, her price for a night or for a week-end by the sea—that very decision made of her, in the eye of her little world, the property of Paco; not so much his mistress as the instrument of his important nocturnal diversions to which it was well known that all serious-minded men were subject in the years before their marriage.

Dominique received several limpid intimations of this attitude within a month of her life alone. The first was of no special significance to her and she would not have found it disturbing had it not been followed by others, more serious, and far more humiliating. Accompanied by Paco, Dominique sometimes varied her routine of cinema, night-club and dancing with a visit to a party given by Angéles, or some other of her friends.

At one of these parties Dominique met a woman called Suzy Pajot, whom she had encountered many times previously during her life with Thornton, at Freddy Cherr's and elsewhere. This woman, Dominique's compatriot, had lived in Spain for many years, almost since her childhood. She was blonde with a genuine Picard blondness, had brought vivacity to a point where it was no longer merely a question of vocal and manual gymnastics but, rather, of a constant hum of sub-lubricious chatter: so much so, indeed, that one felt that it was rather in this manner that

Mistinguett or Edith Piaf might have behaved if exiled to barbarous foreign parts and required to give, year after year, in order to sustain the belief of the natives in that fable, a representation of a lively *Parisienne*.

It is quite erroneous to imagine that social distinctions are of minor importance in France: they are more subtle, that is all. Dominique could not dislike Suzy Pajot—that was impossible, so generous of heart and action, beneath the blare of talk, was this woman—but Dominique did most actively and treacherously disapprove of Suzy, and frequently she said so, in language which, if translated into the sporting terms habitually employed by Anglo-Saxons, would probably have been to the effect that Suzy had “*let the side down*”.

What game, exactly, Suzy had been playing during her many years in Barcelona would remain a matter of opinion, but it is quite certain that she had always preferred the individual to the collective effort. Teamwork did not, could not, most incontrovertibly interest Suzy, though she had been known, from time to time, to throw a discarded lover to the pack of minor lionesses who hunted discreetly in her rear, more comely, these, than jackals, yet as sharp of tooth.

Suzy, officially, was a dressmaker: that is, she was a very superior edition of the ‘little woman round the corner’ of whom smart ladies boast yet will not, from household pride, disclose the name. Unofficially, however, Suzy had been very much more than a convenient little woman to several interesting and influential men. Her liaisons had been passionate, but they had also been serene; they had been lengthy but they were never dull. She was Mademoiselle de La Vallière with the intellectual powers of the Pompadour, and when, for some reason—his marriage, his departure to Madrid or increasing age—a lover was obliged to withdraw from Suzy his patronage, she had no need to fear the convent; there was always a new candidate at hand, and all the clothes of all the women of all the previous lovers, to be made.

Suzy was perfectly aware of Dominique’s hostility, and the reason for it, but she was not a malicious woman, and if perhaps she said later to her friends:

“*Elle est trop fière pour sa condition, cette petite. Elle lui viendra un malheur,*” she did not say this, even by a look, to Dominique herself at the party, but, instead, greeted her fellow

citizen of Cythera warmly . . . far too warmly for Dominique's taste, for in the hypersensitive state of the latter's nerves there seemed to be an element of complicity in that too quizzical smile.

Driving home, Dominique was sullen, would not speak. Then, abruptly, as Paco changed gear boldly, exasperating her with his grind and grunch, she burst out:

"I hate that woman Suzy."

"Oh, I think she's rather nice."

"She's a whore."

"Come now, she's nothing of the sort: she's mistress of a very remarkable man who'll be Governor of the Balearics, if all I hear is true."

"Well, that's certainly more than can be said for me," replied Dominique viciously.

She was often cruel to Paco in this way, but he took no offence: his temperament was pliant and equable, and when he attempted to influence Dominique he would do so by diplomacy, and usually with success, for, accustomed for so long to head-on domestic clashes of which the only solution was that one or other of two wills in opposition must yield, Dominique found a new charm in these now subtle attempts to supervise her conduct.

Yet Paco, too, had his troubles—of which as yet Dominique knew nothing—and, as time passed, these grew in intensity, as did her own. At first, when Paco had begun to be seen about with Dominique, his family—even his implacable father—had raised no objection. Indeed, the old man had been rather relieved: since the adventure with the dancer, his son had achieved an almost shameful reputation for celibacy, so that there were some who whispered that he was not a man at all, except upon a horse.

This was the situation until the separation of Dominique from Thornton. At this point the first doubts were born in the paternal mind. He summoned his son to a room in his house which was called the library, although the keys of the bookshelves had long been lost and never conscientiously searched for.

"This woman is your mistress?"

"I love her, Papa."

"Love . . . love . . . we are not talking of love but of your natural needs, to which I admit you have a right. But we want no more stupidities, you understand? There have been enough

already. You are engaged to marry Isabel Carmelo, and you will marry her. I understand that your mistress rides at the *Picadero*, often at the same time as Isabel. Do they speak to each other?"

"No, Papa: they stare."

"Well, it is most inconvenient but not a situation for which I can altogether blame you so long as it is Isabel who retains the right to stare the hardest. Do you understand me? You must keep these two parts of your life quite separate, and you are not to see this woman more than four days a week."

"Very well, Papa." Paco had been obliged to dissimulate with his father for so many years that he had no difficulty whatever in disguising his true feelings now.

It is possible that if Paco had encountered Isabel Carmelo normally, in the course of the social round, he might have fallen in love with, and been perfectly willing to marry, her. This girl was beautiful, not unintelligent, and was much attached to him, and to the fetish of his horsemanship. Unfortunately, however, Isabel represented in human form the third attempt in as many years by Paco's father to impose a commercially advantageous union upon his son. As such, she could only be odious to Paco, and was odious now ~~even~~ in her mannerisms: in the inept way in which she sat upon a horse (she would never be an Amazon), or in the haughty manner which she employed with grooms, or when addressing waiters in a restaurant; or, again, the habit she had of touching her ear-rings continually—from nervousness, in point of fact, but in Paco's eyes to draw attention to their value.

Paco loved Dominique. He had never met a woman like her. He was obsessed by her as men can indeed be obsessed, for an outer limit of two thousand days, by women, physically; but this was as nothing beside the awe with which he regarded her mental powers, her knowledge of life and of the great world, so much of which he had not seen, or had been incapacitated for ever against seeing by a Jesuit education. Women are not only men's negroes: they can also be their squirrels. It seems so dull, somehow, sometimes, to pass another winter in the hollow of the same old tree. Why not take the little pile of nuts to a new tree where the bark appears more tender; where, even if there is no hole made for a nest by Nature, another may be bored, in a matter of moments, by the incisive agents with which that same Nature has endowed us?

Paco loved Dominique almost as deeply as a man can love a woman: with his whole, wounded heart. He wished her very well: he wished to marry her. He had not made a forensic, debating point of this: he was genuinely incapable of criticising his predecessor Thornton . . . he was even prepared to admit that it was not Thornton's fault, and might well have been the man's final misfortune, that he had kidnapped the wrong girl at the wrong moment.

But, love apart, and there was much love, much tenderness, more understanding upon a plane of hands seen trembling, eyes hurt by sleepless nights, than is at all customary—love apart, Paco was intelligent enough to recognise for what it was the thrill, the belated challenge of his masculinity, the "*there you are, that's what you've done*" flung at the expostulating mouth, in the false teeth even (these teeth devised, of course, by the best dentist in Barcelona) of his father.

Paco intended, in fact, at long last to defy and to defeat, in equal combat, his father. To marry a woman who was a foreigner, who would be, *must* be, divorced, who had a child by a previous marriage: such a ceremony was entirely unprecedented in the *milieu* to which Paco gave reluctant allegiance, though his own mother had been French, too, and he would put in hand, among manifold enquiries, one intended also to discover the circumstances of that curious marriage, circumstances which had always been skipped, glozed over, even within the sombre confines of the family photograph album.

It was useless to speak of marriage, now, to Dominique. Whenever he had done so—but he did so no longer—Dominique had laughed at him:

"Dear Paco, as I told my husband the other day, I don't leave one man to throw myself at the mercy of the first buccaneer who happens to present himself."

"But you didn't see your husband the other day—or at least you've never told me so," said Paco.

"That is what I would have said to him if I *had* seen him," replied Dominique sedately.

The task is, indeed, more often prickly, more fraught with danger, than is generally conceded. Only gradually did Paco become aware of it, and then, at first, with disbelief: yet not, surprisingly, sadness.

"Why don't you go up and talk to Georges Ulmer?" he said to her one night in the *Bolero*.

"No, I don't want to."

"But he'd be pleased to see a compatriot . . . especially one he met before, and dined with."

He spoke in all innocence.

So innocent, indeed, was his honesty that she felt a cumulative and electric wave of doubt run through her; for the first time in all her essays at fabulation.

"I only met him for a moment," she replied.

"Aah . . ."

In that exclamation, in that long drawn-out sigh culminating in a Latin vowel of the alphabet, Paco staked his future: he had never lacked courage, except only as a son and, even in that intolerable pocket-money situation, only because he had been brought up to believe in the principles of a Mosaic patriarchy.

"It's always better to tell the truth, Jane," he said. Dominique had decided to change her name to 'Jane', sometime before. *Faire peau neuve*: this phrase, from her own language, applied, interpreted her secret wish. "But Jane is terrible," Thornton had said to her. "You have no right to it and you just don't know how terrible it is . . . Jane and Plain Jane: there is even a rhyme about it. Do stick to Dominique, darling . . . if you can stick to nothing else."

Paco looked at Dominique in the night-club, and it so happened, since important moments are often, accidentally, rung in and delineated upon the surface of the unwary heart by some one of the many mechanical contrivances which Man has designed, with his unmechanical but implacable unconscious, for that very purpose, that a clock behind an old lady holding a black felt hat in the vestibule struck the hour of two.

Calais . . . Calais. Calais . . . Calais.

"We can and will be happy, Jane," said Paco. "To-morrow night, if you like, we'll go out with my brother and his wife."

He knew that this was like offering a child a sweet of which it does not know the taste. He knew that the time had not yet come to speak, except in an ambassadorial way, of marriage with him, as her solution: her trouble was too recent. It needs a fair wind, bearing seeds, and time for flowers to grow on devastated ground.

Sometimes, when she made him photograph the child,

Geneviève, he would look at them both intently, above the little black machine, after the thing had made the click which took the photograph which went . . . where? Two prints, at present, were still needed.

"If she's never learnt some things," he thought, "then that is not her fault. But I will teach her . . . I will help her; and to that child I'll give what my father never gave to me."

It is people like this Paco who make the world go round: or, rather, it is people like Paco who keep this dead thing with the live surface turning . . . turning. . . .

Round and round, on the same axis, with the eternal phenomenon of night and day, with eighty-eight who die each second, and somewhat more than eighty-eight who weep.

One evening, as promised, Paco took Dominique out to dinner with his brother and sister-in-law. This was the good brother, the industrious apprentice. Youngest of a trio, of whom Paco was the second, he had affranchised himself from the paternal tyranny by an early and advantageous marriage and by becoming a lawyer. It is difficult to argue with lawyers, and almost impossible to dominate them emotionally from a parental standpoint because, not only are their natural emotions withered gradually by the practice of their profession, but they can make glib answer to objurgation by sinister mention of questions beyond the scope of laymen, such as filiation. This brother had once reduced his father to impotent and vindictive silence by criticising, not the terms, as expected, but the *style* of one of the old man's numerous wills.

These tactics this brother, whose only disadvantage in life was perhaps his name—it was Innocencio, had employed now for many years, and through them he had achieved a measure of independence quite unknown in other sectors of the Llavaneras family.

He greeted Dominique with warmth, as did his wife, a young woman upon whose essentially cumbrous mind a year at the Sorbonne had inculcated certain liberal principles concerning events in the life of others; events, that is to say, which did not affect her personally, make burglary upon her interests.

Dominique did not pause to reflect that it was rather curious—*inusite*—that she should have been asked to meet these people at a

Barceloneta restaurant—that is to say in a place patronised, in winter, by tourists alone—and not at their house, which was close to her own. Dominique was quite simply delighted to make their acquaintance, and did not bother to interrogate the circumstances of the encounter. She dressed herself with a special, a rather touching, care: she wished to make a good impression upon her lover's relatives. This was an occasion, after all. The only respectable people whom she seemed to meet nowadays were those who were attempting, often with considerable success, to appear disreputable.

The meeting was, to all appearances, a great success. The brother was visibly captivated by Dominique, and danced with her many more times than the strict Barcelona protocol concerning *afición* to brothers' mistresses demanded. The woman, too, surpassed in beauty but not in jewellery, nor even in the knowledge of a small world which she had made her own, was amiable, and behind those doors unsullied by the touch of any other than a female hand—in premises as remote, as Bernard Shaw once maintained, from the male half of mankind as the small of one's back—she went so far as to say, with powder puff suspensive:

"My dear, you're so good for Paco."

So good for Paco? Dominique had not previously considered the situation from this point of view, had tended, indeed, to think Paco good for *her*! However, it had been a pleasant evening, and about a week later it was followed by another, and a few days later still by yet another: but always in public places; and when Dominique met the brother and his wife by accident at the polo club, on a Sunday, their manner was formal, almost chilly.

"What was wrong with them to-day?" she said afterwards to Paco. "Don't they like me?"

Paco seemed embarrassed: "Yes, of course they do, but . . ."

"But what?" she insisted.

"Ah, they're stupid." Paco floundered. Then suddenly he burst out: "They're *all* so stupid. They don't realise the strength of my feeling for you."

"You mean they think I'm just a passing phase . . . like a flower in your buttonhole, or something?"

"No."

Paco may not have meant that, but his relatives and acquaintances most certainly did. From their standpoint, Dominique was

entitled to a certain latitude, to certain privileges because of her status as a foreigner—but one had to draw the line somewhere and quite a number of people were, so to speak, busy crouching and inscribing chalk circles around Dominique, wherever she chanced to go. And foremost among such people were the faction which—in some cases from a genuine feeling of resentment, in others because the possibilities of creating further scandal were so alluring—rose in support of the jilted fiancée, Isabel Carmelo. Isabel was not by nature vindictive and, because the rupture between herself and Paco, although real, had never been formally recognised by their respective families, she would perhaps have been content to wait, to bide her time, had not some ingenious person put into circulation a rumour calculated to make even the meekest and most long-suffering of young women distraught with rage and hatred: namely that with face tear-stained and hair awry Isabel had, by bribing a servant (presumably the incorruptible Pepita), secured admittance to Dominique's flat and, once in the presence of the *femme fatale*, had fallen on her knees, begging for mercy and the release of her lover.

From that moment the situation can be said to have become genuinely galvanic, and, indeed, it can best be illustrated by a slight rearrangement of the social circumstances said to have pertained in Verona beneath the rule of Escalus. Far from being mortal enemies, the two families, Capulet and Montague, were united by the bonds of friendship, and by complementary commercial interests: the one family manufacturing silk doublets, the other the heraldic devices made of lace which were subsequently sewn upon the essential articles of clothing. The two young persons, Roméo and Juliet, affianced since their earliest youth, pursue at the playhouse and in more private lieux a tranquil love which must lead them before many months have passed to the altar. . . .

But suddenly young Montague is stricken mad: he has always been a gay young blade, much addicted to the stews and to the women of the town, but now he elevates one of these latter, Rosina—whom Shakespeare, mistakenly, mentions only briefly and with contempt—to honours and to privileges which all agree are the right of legitimacy alone. Moreover, this Rosina is not even a citizen of Verona: she is from Mantua, an outlandish creature, and who knows of what dark parentage? In such

circumstances who can wonder that there should be a dozen fiery Tybalts spoiling for a quarrel.

It was not, however, Isabel's, but a much more unexpected visit which Dominique eventually received. One evening when Paco was away in Lerida, Dominique was in her bath when Pepita knocked on the door and announced that there was a señor to see her;

"What señor?"

"He didn't say: an old señor."

"Tell him to wait," said Dominique. Who could it be, she wondered; and since the bathroom was next door to the sitting-room she listened to the movement of feet, to a cough, endeavouring to identify her visitor.

Five minutes later she emerged, clad in a dressing-gown, her hair dishevelled, her face glistening with cold cream—the very picture, in fact, of a scarlet woman captured in the intimacy of her lair—to be confronted with Llavaneras père, whom she knew well by sight.

"Please sit down. What can I do for you? Will you have some coffee?"

"No coffee, thank you," replied the old man, with something of the manner of a detective refusing a drink from a suspected person.

He stared at his son's silver cup upon the mantelpiece.

"I came to see you about my son."

"Yes?"

"I want to know what are your intentions towards him."

Dominique had small desire to show hostility, and still less did she wish to be placed in a false position, but this remark struck her as so absurd that she burst out laughing.

"Isn't that a question one usually asks men, not women?" she said.

Old Llavaneras smiled thinly. "Usually . . . yes," he said. "But unfortunately my son is not very usual. It might be better for himself, and certainly for everyone else, including you, if he were." He looked at Dominique steadily. "You are very beautiful," he said. "Very beautiful, indeed."

"Even just out of my bath?" said Dominique.

"Perhaps not quite so beautiful as when you are in it."

Dominique looked at him. "That is the kind of remark which

you make to the kind of woman whom you suppose me to be, isn't it?" she said.

"The remark was not meant indelicately but as the expression of my conviction," said Llavaneras. He raised his head sharply: "Is that your child I hear crying?"

"Yes," said Dominique. "But the maid will look after her."

"Always?" said old Llavaneras.

"In so far as there will always be a maid to do so . . . yes."

"Quite . . . but that was not what I meant."

"I know quite well what you meant," said Dominique, "and, to say the least, it is rather disobliging. I am not an adventuress. If anyone is running after anyone, it is your son after me, not I after him."

"*La Dame aux Camellias* made such the same remark to another father," said the old man. "I trust we shall both show ourselves rather more intelligent in the present circumstances," and he smiled at Dominique again, but this time quite genially: "Tell me," he said: "I don't wish to be indiscreet but . . . are you really married?"

"Why? Is it being put about that I'm not."

He nodded: "I have had heard a rumour to that effect, certainly."

Dominique rose. She opened her writing-desk, searched among the papers, and returned to the old man holding her marriage certificate. Llavaneras glanced at it.

"I know Narbonne," he said. "A very pretty town."

"My father lives near there," said Dominique.

"Ah . . . so you have a father? Then tell me: what does he think of these recent events?"

"My father would never dream of interfering in my private affairs."

"Nor even in those of his granddaughter—his only granddaughter perhaps?"

"Still less."

Dominique examined the old man: he was not so old, really, but he had already adopted the manners, the clothes of the old, the suit sombre in hue, the marks of cigarette ash upon his waistcoat, the watch-chain inherited perhaps from his own father. At what age had Señor Llavaneras decided that his personality required that watch-chain . . . at forty-five, at fifty? Perhaps his tailor

had, in the last resort, been responsible; inserting artfully and with premeditation a small snitch in some waistcoat, through which a chain might pass? Or perhaps Señor Llavaneras had appropriated and adorned himself with the watch and chain, as with some badge of office, on the very day of his father's death? Dominique remembered one of her own cousins, now dead in Indo-China, who had shocked her deeply by precisely such behaviour, in the matter of his dead parent's set of cut-throat razors. The cousin had been weeping for over two hours. He was still weeping as he slid the slim black cases containing the razors into his hip-pocket, ten minutes before the lawyers reached the house.

But the old man was speaking . . . Dominique leant forward attentively, for the occasion was, after all, important: she desired, and was determined, to gain this man's respect.

"A woman is really beginning to go downhill, or has never been up it," she had once said to Thornton, *"when she simpers at old men's compliments."* Dominique would still have endorsed that sentiment, had she been reminded of it, but she would now have qualified it by stating that there were exceptions to all rules of apophthegm. Old Llavaneras was Paco, but a Paco without the doubts, without the constant shifts in moral emphasis, without the need of her. To begin with, he was at least twenty-five pounds heavier than his son, and that twenty-five pounds cast a pear-shaped stomach shadow across the bathroom weighing-machine, but was distributed in terms of bone, in muscle which, if slack now, had once known moments of tautness and applause . . . muscle distributed, indeed, in extra length of leg, in extra width of the thoracic cage, in shoulders which the tailor who had been so clever with the watch-chain surely did not need to pad? In looking at this man, Dominique thought of friends of hers who had loved, been loved—or not loved, and been loved—but who had in all and each of these cases, been financially supported by old men. Dominique had always considered such conduct, whether inspired by genuine affection or not, most reprehensible, but now, quite suddenly, she saw that it was not so at all . . . oh! to take a pair of pincers to that pendant moustache, those bushy eyebrows . . . oh! to smear a saving, unguent cream upon those flaccid chops, those demi-lunar pouches beneath still shining eyes.

" . . . And so I think that what I ask of you is reasonable."

"Eh?" said Dominique.

"Weren't you listening to me?" he said.

"Not really," she replied. "I'm sorry. I'm sometimes like that. I watch a person's face and think *about* them, not about what they're saying at all."

"Very well," said the old man composedly. "I will begin again, and this time more briefly. I am not your enemy. I know nothing about you: you may be a very worthy person. I am not even the enemy of my son, although he has persuaded himself that such is the case. But I *am* the head of my family, and I intend to remain so. Now I don't wish you to think of this as an interrogation, but you would oblige me by answering certain questions. I observe, for instance, that this flat has been recently refurnished. Who paid for that?"

"Your son did," said Dominique.

"And you think it right and proper to accept gifts of that kind from my son?"

"You mean in return for services rendered?" said Dominique.

"You are very insulting, you know, Señor Llavaneras."

"I do not mean to be insulting. That is not my intention at all. Unfortunately, the subject is not one which lends itself to great delicacy of expression, and I wish to find out the facts."

"Well, here is the fact, then," said Dominique. "I shall pay that money back to your son at the end of this month."

"Yes, I dare say," replied the old man. "But how? With money received from your husband, I presume? Is that not rather like robbing Peter to pay a quite unnecessary Paul?" He blinked at her. "Then, next month, what will happen? My son's is a generous nature. He may wish to give you something else; something more tangible. Will you accept that, too . . . on the understanding that you are to make repayment?"

"You seem very concerned with retaining your wealth, don't you?" said Dominique.

"That is perhaps because I do not regard it as mine, but as something which must be divided between nearly a dozen persons at my death," said the old man. "It may interest you to know that, with that object in view, I have decided to cut down Paco's allowance by half until this present situation is clarified."

"Isn't that rather unfair? Paco works for his money. His work has surely got nothing to do with his private life?"

"Yes, that might be so if Paco were a good factory manager.

But unfortunately he is not. I could obtain a better one in ten minutes by going out into the street. Therefore, this measure is perfectly justified and it will remain in force until this situation is clarified . . . one way or the other."

"But there is *no* situation, can't you see?" said Dominique wearily. "Paco may wish to marry me, but I have never thought of marrying Paco. The idea has never entered my head."

"You are being disingenuous, madame. The idea has certainly entered your head, and it will do so increasingly as time goes by, because circumstances will make it appear as the only practical solution to your problems. I do not wish to pry into your marital affairs but surely you can see that every week which passes must make more impossible any chance of resuming your life with your husband, even if you should wish to do so."

"Let us leave my husband out of this, if you please," said Dominique.

"Very well, we will leave that unfortunate man to choose his own road to perdition—for, as you may guess, I have made enquiries about him—and we will consider the case of my son, of whose behaviour I may indeed disapprove: but that does not mean that I wish to see him ruin himself entirely."

"But why . . . why should Paco ruin himself?" said Dominique. "I am not the plague, or the typhus. You are dramatising the whole business, Señor Llanerías, and I think rather unfairly . . . because it suits you to do so."

The old man shook his head. "No, you are wrong; and you do me an injustice," he said. "I do not ask you to believe me, but my concern—and for reasons which I will presently explain—is partly for you in this matter. You are married, you have a child, you enjoyed until recently a certain position in this city which we all love in our different ways. You are therefore not to be compared in any manner with others of your countrywomen who have made—if you will forgive the expression—almost a monopoly of a certain form of erotic activity in this town." At this point, observing that Dominique was about to intervene, he continued, rapidly: "It is precisely for that reason that your situation at present is very different from that of . . ." and here he looked at her shrewdly, ". . . that of Mademoiselle Suzy Pajot, for instance; had Paco become involved with her."

"In what way, please?" said Dominique, in a hard voice.

"There is a Spanish word—'Caballero'—of which I know no exact equivalent in any foreign language. Even the English 'gentleman'," he pronounced it 'hentlemann', "does not imply all that we imply with our word, here; and in your own country the phrase '*C'est un monsieur*' is used only too frequently to suggest that the person discussed is important or powerful; not to indicate that he enjoys any delicacy of feeling, though I dare say that that is sometimes the case."

"Yes?" said Dominique.

"In leaving your husband you became the mistress of my son. If disposed, vindictive people may have attempted to treat you coldly, and with the show of contempt which virtuous people always reserve for others who do the things which they would like to do themselves, but daren't; but their real feelings were not like that at all . . ."

"Then they concealed their real thoughts?" said Dominique. Since the man was so evidently sincere, she had not wished to be ironic, but the thing was forced upon her because she did not know the right change of mood in response to his own.

"Whatever they may say," he said, "those people . . . most people, in fact . . . possibly all people . . . regard Paco, in their hearts, as responsible for you now. No . . . don't interrupt: I know you don't like that idea, but that is how it is."

"So what would you like me to do?" she said quietly. "I am not horrid, you know. Perhaps you can see that . . ."

"Why don't you bring your father here?" he said. "I am not, naturally, some kind of private detective, but I think you'll agree that you have thrust the role on me. I made . . . I was obliged to make some enquiries about your father, too. Why don't you ask him to come?"

"Because I have a certain pride in myself, and because I don't want an old man, who has done me no harm, to be obliged to travel two hundred miles, into a foreign country, in order to examine a complicated case of adultery about which he is not qualified to give an opinion," said Dominique, and she said that in a rush.

"Your sentiments do you honour," said old Lllavaneras, "but sentiment is one thing—and fact and practical possibility quite another. Let us put it this way, and I will try and explain myself as simply as I can. My son has now, by his conduct, lost all hope

of the marriage which I would have wished for him. I could perhaps, if you and he were separated and the insult forgotten—as insults often tend to be, progressively patch things up with Carmelo, whom I have known since we were small boys without handkerchiefs to wipe our snotty noses . . . I could do that . . . but what purpose would be served? I have had very little happiness of that kind in my own life. Perhaps that is why, when the interests of my family are not threatened, I prefer to think that others will be happy.” He looked at her. “Paco’s youth was a very long one indeed, and his follies were numerous, and I dare say he has told you of some of them because with all his faults he is an honest boy. No . . . don’t interrupt: I am not attacking my son, but trying to explain him, and myself as well, to you. I can well imagine that Paco does love you sincerely and that he has reached the time of life at last when such a love is possible. I can see very clearly, too—more clearly than you can guess—that his marriage to Isabel would be unhappy, a marriage full of bitterness and vain regrets. But this other thing . . . the thing with you: is that the solution? I want so much for him to settle down, you see. He *needs* to settle down.”

“What you are really doing, isn’t it, with your opposition and this thing about the money,” said Dominique, “is to put him to the test . . . put both of us to the test, perhaps?”

He looked at her. “Is that so unfair?” he said. Then: “Where were you married to your husband?”

“At a *mairie*, in France.”

“Why? Are you not a Catholic?”

“Yes, but Des . . . my husband is not one.”

“So, that in the eyes of the Church you are not married at all, then?”

“I am not interested in the eyes of the Church,” said Dominique.

“Possibly not—but you may be prepared to give a lot for a smile from her one day. Now listen to me, and again I say that I am not speaking as your enemy. Do you never think of the future at all?”

“I am young,” said Dominique. “The future comes gradually. Why should I spend my time plotting and planning?”

“No one is asking you to make plots, but in your own interest should you not be a little more discreet? You are putting yourself in the wrong. I know a little of your husband’s character, but you

would not like him to be in a position to take your child away, would you?"

"My husband would never dream of doing such a thing. He has a child of his own. You shouldn't talk of things you know nothing about."

"You are wrong, madame." I am talking about the human feeling of resentment, which I know very well because I meet it in business every day of my life. Your husband may have agreed to give you money each month for your child, but if he discovers that you are at the same time receiving money from my son, he may decide that he has no further obligations towards you."

"My husband would never do anything so petty."

"You think so? You said you were young. Now I see that you are, indeed, young, if you do not know that men often behave in a petty, even spiteful way, when they can persuade themselves that their motives are high-minded and noble. All sorts of ideas may be going through your husband's head. He may think, for example, that it would be a good thing if you were to marry the man for whom you have left him. And if he thinks that, he may find the idea very attractive—for it is an intoxicating thought for any man to think that he can control to some extent the destinies of someone over whom he has no longer direct influence."

The old man paused. He stroked his moustache gently. "And since we are on the subject," he said, "and the date is now the fifth of the month, perhaps you will tell me whether you have received any money from him this month?"

"You have no right to ask such a question."

"But have you . . .?"

Dominique stared at him. "What have you done?" she said. "Have you been to see Desmond?"

"That is not necessary when there is such a civilised convenience as the letter post. The information which I caused to be conveyed to your husband may be a little premature, but, after all, I was only anticipating . . ."

Dominique stared at him for a moment; then she burst into tears. She ran across the room and flung herself face downwards on the sofa. "I hate you all," she sobbed. "Oh, how I hate you all with your beastliness, your sordid sense of power."

The old man rose. He leant, and placed a hand on her shoulder. "That is because you have put yourself in a position where hate is

engendered," he said. "But I do not hate you: not at all. What I have done has been done because I, too, think that you must choose. You cannot live in two worlds, exacting tribute from each. You are a proud and wilful young woman and at present you consider that anybody who does anything counter to your immediate interests is an enemy. But other people have interests: it is time that you realised that."

"Leave me alone," said Dominique. She pushed aside his hand, rose, went over to the telephone. She dialled a number, standing; and staring meanwhile with sombre hatred at her guest. "It doesn't answer," she said presently. "It doesn't answer."

"Is that so surprising?" said the old man. "The world moves on. People cannot always be at home, awaiting your convenience. Perhaps your husband is out . . . he, too, may wish to amuse himself."

"I will tell Paco of this," said Dominique. She replaced the receiver.

"It will not make Paco dislike me any more or any less than he does already," replied the old man. "I am used to my son's hatred. My task is the ungrateful one of acting in his best interests . . . and, I repeat, in your interests, too."

"I loathe you," said Dominique. "I ~~loathe~~ you: I loathe everything about you."

She opened the french windows and went out on to the balcony. The night was warm. She leant against the parapet and stared down at the silent street. She stayed there for at least five minutes, allowing her tears to flow freely, without even using her handkerchief to staunch them. Then a sound—a strange and unusual sound—in the room behind her caused her to turn.

The old man was bent almost double in his chair. Both his hands were clasped upon his chest.

"Water . . ." he said. "Please—bring me water . . . quickly."

"I do not believe you are ill," said Dominique. "You are acting, as you did when you first arrived here."

Yet the entire appearance of the man contradicted her statement: his lips were blue, there were heavy beads of sweat upon his forehead, his breath came in long, raucous gasps. Although his hands were still, clamped against his chest, they seemed to be endeavouring to lift a great weight which was stifling him.

Dominique went into the kitchen. She brushed Pepita aside, returned to the sitting-room with a glass of water.

"Pills . . ." he said. "In my pocket . . . on the right."

Dominique felt in his pocket. She found the tube: "How many?" she said.

"Three." He opened his mouth. She placed the pills on his tongue. The pills were round and red. One fell out of his mouth on to his waistcoat, down past the watch-chain. Dominique did not bother to pick it up. She gave him another. It was like feeding worms to a small bird, a fledgeling. He sipped with difficulty.

"I am sorry," he said. "It will pass . . . it will pass," and, indeed, the attack did seem to be passing: the sweat was less abundant, the face less congested, but the hands remained clamped to the chest, the finger-tips clawing at the cloth.

"You had better lie down," said Dominique. "Let me help you up."

He did his best to rise. She supported him. He fell across the bed with one leg dangling loose. His appearance, seen from above, was frightening, and repulsive.

"I can send the maid for a doctor," said Dominique. "Shall I do that?"

"No, no . . . it will pass . . . it always passes. Please excuse me. I feel . . . very ashamed of myself."

She sat there, watching him. For five minutes she sat watching him. Then he seemed better, much better.

"Would something hot be any good?" she said. "Some tea . . .?"

"Nothing, thank you. I'm sorry . . . emotion . . . not supposed to indulge in it." He gave a mucous sound which she supposed to be intended as a chuckle. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry . . ."

"Don't keep saying that," she said. "You only say it because you are frightened of dying."

"Oh no," he said. "This is like the bullet you hear whistling past you. The attack that kills you, you don't hear at all." Again he gave the mucous sound, the chuckle. "Still, it is better than cancer . . . it isn't continuous. It's like having a private dentist, and every three weeks or so he says: '*Well, let's have three more out.*' It doesn't last longer or even hurt much more . . . but the dentist does sometimes choose inconvenient moments."

For the third time, that chuckle.

"Would you do me a kindness?" he said presently.

"Yes."

"I don't want to abuse your hospitality but it would be better for me—though not perhaps for you," he smiled, "if I remained quite still for half an hour. Would you ring up my wife, and say that she is not to worry: that I will be home, presently." He stopped afid looked at her heavily. "I would appreciate it also if you would say where I am," he added.

"Very well," said Dominique. "Give me the number."

She dialled the number, conscious that he was watching every movement of her hands, every twitch of her face; conscious also of the other number which she had dialled a bare half hour earlier.

"Do you want me to say that you have been taken ill?" she asked, when the maid who answered the telephone had gone to look for her mistress.

"I want you to say what you please."

Dominique said that he had not been feeling very well, and would be slightly delayed. When requested to give further information she rang off.

Llavaneras had listened to every word, intently. "You are harder than me," he said. "At heart, you are harder than me, because everything you do seems to you perfectly normal, most reasonable, even. I wouldn't be at all surprised if you were to write to your husband, quite soon, and suggest that he should leave Barcelona."

"Your wife is not Spanish," she said. "She has an accent."

"So, have you . . . and the accent is the same, although somewhat modified by thirty-five years in this country. My wife is French."

"And it was for that reason, of course, that you made me telephone her?"

"Exactly. Because I have not the strength at the moment for the further explanation which I wished to make to you."

"And you say I am hard . . . you say I am hard . . . me!"

"It is less the situation as it affects you at present which should interest you, I should have thought," he said, "than the idea that my son—who has told you so many things—has never told you that his mother, too, was French."

"I don't think you need worry," she said. "Pago will hear my opinion about it."

"Yes, I dare say . . . but although you are young you are not stupid. Does it not seem to you curious that my son, who expends the little moral strength which he possesses in going contrary to me in everything, should follow my lead in this alone? Doesn't it seem to you significant that he should have concealed that one essential item, alone, from you?"

"I never asked him. I wasn't made for mothers-in-law."

"What I am going to say to you will seem, at first, very objectionable," said Lllavaneras. "How can I put it decently? . . . it seems to me in some way unfair that I should grow old and be subject to this painful and invariably fatal illness while my son rides horses, to ladies' claps, at my expense."

"Yes," she said, grown to appreciate her own interest now. "Yes, I can see that very well."

"I don't believe you can," he said, "but a fairy story which went wrong does no one any harm . . . and, to you, it might do even good. Shall I tell it to you?"

"If you like," said Dominique.

"One should always try and find out the reasons why people become unsentimental," he said. "You hit a ball: it sails away. You as much as touch a man, nowadays: he howls for the protection of his union, or the State. In Spain, at least, the man on top puts his life in play. My two brothers were murdered here, in Barcelona, in the first days of the Civil War. They were found in a ditch on the road to Castelldefels. In the hands of one of them some damned fool had placed a missal. My wife is French. I have not been as unhappy as I imagined with her. That is all."

"Yes," said Dominique. "A telegram contains all, too: '*I'm coming*' . . . '*He's dead*' . . . but nothing else."

She stared at him. Evidently he was trying to tell her something which he considered of importance . . . but *what?* . . . *what?* His lips moved: he seemed to search for words, to taste and try, and then reject them. At last he found the line of thought which he required: "I am old enough now," he said, "to realise that it is no use attempting to influence people . . . least of all with the story of one's life, for then they will say: '*Yes, but I will not make those mistakes . . . him perhaps . . . but never me.*' Nor am I cynical: I do not despise the word which you young

people use so frequently, that word 'love', for I have proved that love can grow in ground which all thought would prove quite barren, though it is perhaps not the kind of love to which *you* would give that name." He smiled at her. "My own story is the reverse of yours because in my case the parental opposition came from the other side: from the family of my wife. They were from Perpignan . . . and Catalans, like us, but with this difference . . . that they were *French* Catalans, and there is no greater misunderstanding in the whole world than between two men of the same blood, separated by a political frontier."

"You gave your wife three children," said Dominique. "Did you do that only because you needed future managers for factories?"

"By no means. I loved her: but her ways are not our ways, never could become our ways. We may regret these things, but they are there, and inescapable. We may think that the divisions of Europe are ridiculous, and parochial, but the fact remains that there is less difference between an Argentinian and a man from Bismarck, North Dakota, than there is between a Swiss and a Neapolitan."

"What are you trying to say to me?" said Dominique.

"Nothing . . . nothing . . . or perhaps just this: be careful—be careful that you don't spoil the little compartment which you keep well swept and clean, because it's nearest to your heart."

"I don't understand these allegories," said Dominique. "Can't you speak plainly, simply, without all this embroidery!"

"Yes, certainly I could, but I don't choose to because embroidery is useful . . . sometimes. My wife and I have been busy making embroidery throughout our life together."

"How many years?" she said.

"Thirty-seven now," he answered.

There was a pause, a long pause at this point. The young woman, on her chair, the man, recumbent, looked at each other, eye meeting eye, thought fumbling for thought; up-rise of feeling broken as are proud waves against a beach.

"Think about it," he said. "Think . . . *think*. I am only partially your enemy. In the good things, the things we'd all like to be worthy of, I'm not your enemy at all, but only a sad, sad man who has seen his youth and all his middle years slip away in an endeavour far beyond his strength."

"And why did you let that slip away?" she said, "Because you thought it more profitable to conform, to give in . . . and keep the glory of a voluntary surrender."

"No," he said. "There you are wrong. There are better things. A man meets a woman . . . the woman, the man. The enchantment cannot last: they both know it, but if they are willing then something may grow of the love that was love, that is greater than love, and far better."

"You are re-living your youth," said Dominique. "I have often noticed that old people tend to do this."

"You think so? You are wrong. Six months can now go by, but it is not until they are past that I will receive you in my house. My son's feelings will not change: they *cannot* change because he has committed himself, and it is the casual manner in which he did so which annoys me . . . something between him and me, something which has nothing to do with your numerous virtues . . . too numerous for my taste, if you wish to know."

"Before you came here," said Dominique, "you prepared your speeches. But now, I suppose, they all seem stupid . . . stupid to you?"

"Yes," he said. "They do . . . they do and they don't. I should have known whom I would be seeing, but one is so much happier with conventional ideas until one sees them wither. Life is so absolute in its conclusions. One dies so soon. No man can wish with all his heart to do another harm, because all men are like patients in adjacent beds in hospitals. What will you do if your child grows up in Spain? What nationality will she be . . . what languages will she talk, and with what accent . . . who will she belong to . . . what will be her thoughts, and what will be your own, when you see her turn against you, as she most surely will?"

The door-bell rang. Dominique heard Pepita leave the kitchen, go out into the hall, pause in order to peer through the Judas; then open the door, and murmur some indistinguishable and mysterious words.

"That is probably Paco," she said.

"No, it is not Paco," he replied. "Paco cannot come here to-night."

Pepita entered the sitting-room: "There is another señor to see you, señora," she said. She glanced at Llavarras: "Another

old señor," she said. "These things are a pity," she said. "The child is restless: she cannot sleep."

"Excuse me," said Dominique to Llavaneras. "Excuse my maid, too."

She went out. In a distant room the child began to cry, and so Pepita went out too, to comfort her.

"Papa," the old man heard Dominique saying; and then the sound of kisses; then silence, then more kisses; and then whispers.

Dominique's father entered the room, parting the curtains with a furious air; rather as might have done some Christ, whip in hand, anxious to perform execution upon Pharisees and other varied miscreants: victims of the sin of pride.

He was shorter than his daughter and, with his untrimmed *Gauloise* moustache and errant eyebrows, more bristly: the hedgehog element in the family, no doubt.

"Is this the man?" he said in a voice which caused the persons in the flat downstairs to pause in their game of chess and to lift their heads enquiringly.

"No, Papa," said Dominique. "That is his father."

"His father, you say?" Monsieur Thibaud examined the recumbent and supine figure of his adversary. Then he turned to his daughter, with a swordsman's flourish which came as naturally to him as it must have to D'Artagnan, for he represented the immigrant Gascon influence in the town council of Pézenac.

"I called on Desmond," he said, "but he wasn't there. He went away three days ago."

"Really?" said Dominique, and she felt her heart thump. Then she looked at Llavaneras. "I suppose that there are certain things which people like you will never understand," she said.

"Certain things?" said Monsieur Thibaud, her father. "Everything, you mean." He sat down on the bed. "You must make your trains run quicker: it leaves less time for thought," he said. His Spanish was perfect, untinctured by Catalan overtones. Each word was as the suck of sweet dulcet lollipop in his mouth: he was making repayment of it all . . . a nice man, he had no wish to be nice to-day; on the contrary, one black mark to the ticket collector who had woken him up at Flassa, on the way from Port Bou, another to the porter who, ignoring his signal, had chosen more numerous baggage than his own at the Estación de Francia, in

Barcelona. Spain, he had always thought, was less than France, although her playground.

He examined Llavaneras.

"Didn't I know you, anyway, at Montpellier University?" he said. "The name is familiar, and the expression, too . . . particularly the expression: that way you make your lips thin."

"It is very likely," said Llavaneras. He now presented the appearance of a man who had been, throughout the happy moments of diversion, recuperating his forces, preparing himself for a battle to come.

"I have arrived here of my own accord," said Dominique's father, "and because I know that it was about time that I did come."

"I had better make you gentlemen some coffee," said Dominique. "It is obvious that you are going to talk for a very long time."

She went into the kitchen, spoke to Pepita, and, with some employment of domestic rhetoric, succeeded in convincing her employee that no treachery of any kind was intended; and that even unworthy men need coffee.

When she returned eventually, to the sitting-room, the two old men barely looked at her. They had forgotten the motives of their mutual antagonism and the excellent reasons which each possessed to murder the other. "*Papa is always late,*" thought Dominique. "*It would have been quite different if he'd come half an hour ago . . .*"

"Where are you, Desmond . . . where have you gone . . . is this some new stupidity? Your ideas often hurt me more than you can possibly imagine, because I still put them into practice when I shouldn't . . . shouldn't.

"There is a part of me which loves you so much; but there's another part which loves the love which works. It's so easy for you to laugh at Paco, to call him a '*pantin*', a useless doll; but Paco has a harder task than ever you did. And I'm not mercenary, Desmond . . . I'm not . . . I'm *not*. Maybe, in ten years time, I'll understand all this much better . . . maybe, in ten years, you'll have managed to be what you want to be so much: and I mean, of course . . . dead, or at least a little dead.

"That stupid man . . . that *stupid* man: why couldn't he speak at once about his wife . . . and then Papa . . . *Papa* . . . it only needed that, and I can hear them talking now . . . about me? . . . about you . . . ? Oh no, not at all: they were both, in their youth, supporters of the Sète football club and are now alarmed that it is threatened with descent into the French Second Division."

"The coffee is ready, Señora Dommy," said Pepita.

"Serve it, and let's hope it scalds them," said Dominique. She stared at Pepita for a moment, then added: "Lock Geneviève's door, please. I want no old men in there to-night."

Twelve

"AVIGNON . . . 13 KMS," declared the kilometric stone.

"This road is a ribbon of moonlight," said Barry.

"Eh?" said the Spaniard, Mariano.

"I'm quoting you the first line of a poem I was obliged to learn at school," replied Barry. "The next line goes on to say that people who walk along roads at night should wear rubber-soled shoes."

"You are always finding fault," said Mariano. "You found fault with that fish we had for dinner. I was embarrassed."

"I was merely pointing out that a strong caper sauce is insufficient to disguise stale whiting. You are too sensitive, my friend. I hope your knees are not sensitive, too, because we must now leave this road and plough through that charming gorse."

"I was climbing hills the day you cried because they wouldn't let you dress your sister's doll," said Mariano.

"You have a lively imagination," said Barry, "but if I were you I'd save it to consider what would happen if your voice was overheard by some rusty men with guns. Come on."

They entered the gorse, which lay scattered in clumps about the hillside. In the moonlight it was possible to distinguish each clump of gorse several yards ahead, but every now and then, if height were not to be lost, there came a time when the two men were obliged to blunder on, with needle points ripping at their trousers. Whenever this occurred, Mariano would give a grunt of ironical

satisfaction, but Barry paid no attention to it; the relations between the two men reposed upon a basis of acrimonious badinage, behind which each liked and trusted the other.

"Right! Here we are," said Barry as they reached the top of the rise.

"Is that the house?" said Mariano. Despite his boasting, he was glad to take a rest. He had been too long in Paris.

"No," said Barry. "It's the Alhambra at Granada.

"You must always be amusing," said Mariano. He pointed: "Why is there such a high wall round it?"

"Because it was once, I understand, a private home for rich gentlemen of feeble mind," said Barry. "The French Government can also be amusing. No doubt they thought it would be an ideal place in which to shut up a distinguished dissident."

"I can see no movement," said Mariano.

"You will in a moment." Barry looked at his watch. "It's five to two. If they're punctual they'll be changing the sentry soon: then we can see whether the man is fixed or mobile." He peered. "Can you make out where he is at present?"

"I've an idea he's over there in the shadow, by the front gate."

They waited. The night was still. Every sound, even the flutter of a bat, many yards away, could be heard distinctly. Punctually at two o'clock the as yet unseen sentry began to cough and stamp his feet. Receiving no answer to his show of impatience, he emerged from the shadow into the moonlight and walked towards the house.

"*Alors . . . quoi, bordel de merde? On est mort là-dedans,*" he shouted.

"What a pity the military will never learn to speak nicely," observed Barry.

The pair watched the new sentry emerge from the house. This man had evidently just left his bed, for he was still buttoning his tunic, and carried his carbine at the trail. The two sentries conferred for a moment: then the man who had been relieved entered the house, whereas the other walked slowly towards the gate and the patch of shadow.

"Well, here we go," said Barry. He began to descend the slope towards the wall surrounding the property.

"Wouldn't it be better to wait half an hour?" suggested Mariano.

"Why? He won't be any more stupid than he is already. Come on, I want to get this over and go to bed myself."

"Sure you don't want me to come in with you?"

"No. This is a dress rehearsal. You can have that honour next time, when it's the real thing, if you're so keen on climbing."

They halted at the wall. At some period, an irrigation ditch had been dug beside this wall, but much of the earth had since caved in. There was also a most conveniently placed medlar tree, the branches of which projected beyond the wall and into the grounds. Barry would not even need the aid of his companion's shoulders for his climb.

"I don't think anything will go wrong," he said, "but if anything does, run round to the front and make a hell of a row by the gate. Otherwise, just wait for me here."

"Good-bye," said Mariano. As soon as Barry was out of sight he lit a cigarette, puffing at it from behind cupped hands.

Barry let himself drop gently upon ground soft from recent rain. Cabbages? No, the forest which rose on every side to the height of his knees proved, upon touch, to be Brussels sprouts. He moved crabwise along a row of these useful plants, but, his attention being given rather towards his objective, the house, than to his immediate surroundings, he presently found himself in a shallow pit which someone had been digging, perhaps for celery. Having negotiated this hazard, listened for hostile sounds, and heard none, he proceeded cautiously through a plantation of bamboo stakes festooned with the withered leaves of tomatoes. Whatever the efficiency, in regard to their duties, of the men entrusted by the State with the guard of this house, there could be no doubt that they had proved themselves enthusiastic gardeners.

At the back of the house lay a lawn, not mown apparently, but summarily scythed from time to time so that the stubble made a rasping sound at the contact of the advancing foot. The house itself was white, square, architecturally undistinguished, with overhanging eaves, and bay windows, which gave it a curious English air. There was no way in which Barry could approach these windows without being seen by anyone who happened to be interested in his activities. Therefore, disdaining further caution, he took a clasp-knife from his pocket and, advancing on tiptoe across a gravel path and a flower bed, set to work upon a sash.

Three minutes later, he was inside what was evidently a library,

and had begun cautiously, and still moving crabwise, to negotiate the various promontories of a shrouded billiard table which lay between himself and the door. In the room the moonlight provided good visibility, but once he had gained the passage outside, it was quite a different matter: a clock ticked ponderously somewhere . . . and somewhere else a man, no doubt one of the guards in the dormitory, was snoring fretfully. Barry was now grateful for the thick carpet in the corridor. He followed the wall with his fingers, feeling for the staircase. Presently he found it; he caressed the polished woodwork and paused to listen for unfriendly sounds: then, hearing nothing, began to mount.

On the first floor, more welcome moonlight showed him a long corridor flanked by no less than eight doors, only two of which could possibly give access to a bathroom or a lavatory, so that the others must necessarily be bedrooms. "*This is a lovely, bloody game,*" thought Barry. "*Why didn't I warn the man that I was coming?*" The only advantage of his present situation, so far as he could surmise, was that since he had been positively assured that no guards slept upstairs, there was now less need to exercise caution. With this in mind, he opened the first of the bedroom doors, and ran the beam of his torch round the room. This was the same pencil torch, incidentally, which Aranjuez had confiscated in Seville prison and later, upon Barry's insistence, had returned. The room was, in fact, a bedroom: but empty.

Barry now opened a second door: which proved to be that of another bedroom; and, once again, an empty one. He had his hand upon the knob of the third door, when—the experience was unpleasant, and rather like feeling a snake move in his hand—the knob turned, the door opened, and he found himself confronted by a small, rather pale-featured man in Arab dress. The man recoiled, but did so less in fright, it seemed, than the better to observe the intruder.

"*Qui êtes-vous?*"

"A friend," replied Barry in Arabic. "Don't be alarmed. I have come with good news for you."

"How did you get in here?"

"How am I going to get out seems more to the point." Barry laid his hand gently on the man's shoulder. "Come," he said. "Let me into your room. We are safer there. I have no time to lose."

"Just one moment, then," said the Arab. He turned, closing the door slightly but not entirely, and spoke to somebody in a low voice. A bed creaked. There was the sound as of bare feet upon the floor: then the further sound of a door closing.

"I am now at your disposal," said the Arab. He drew back, allowing Barry to pass; then he switched on the light, and closed the door. The room smelt heavily of sweat and perfume. The windows were closed tight, but the shutters beyond them stood ajar. Barry pointed to these shutters.

"They will see the light outside."

"It doesn't matter," replied the Arab. "I often read at night. They are used to it." He looked at Barry. "Will you identify yourself, please?" he said.

"I have brought a letter with me which will tell you all you need to know." Barry took the letter from his pocket. "You are not Moulay Hassan himself, of course?" he said.

"No, I am his nephew, and secretary."

"Where is he now?"

"He is asleep, of course. I will read your letter and wake him up if I consider it to be necessary."

"You are not very amiable," said Barry. "You should offer me some incense. I was in such a hurry to see you that I scratched my hand. Look . . ."

"Few prisoners are amiable," said the Arab. He handed Barry a towel. "We have been here eighteen months now. Also, this is an unusual time of night for conversation."

"Not to mention the fact that I disturbed you at your love-making," thought Barry sardonically, as he dabbed. He gave the man the letter, and walking over to the window looked through the chink in the shutters at the drive and main gates of the property. He had no difficulty in marking the position of the sentry because the man was smoking.

The Arab sat down on the rumpled bed. He read Aranjuez's masterpiece at least three times, nodding his head continually while doing so. When he had quite satisfied himself, either as to the nature of the proposition made or to his understanding of it, he folded the letter and replaced it in the envelope.

"Yes, this is excellent," he said. "On behalf of Moulay Hassan I thank you, but could you not have found some other less dangerous way of sending this letter to us?"

"You mean, I suppose, inside a napkin or a loaf of bread, or beneath a steaming pile of *couscous*?" said Barry. "No, I thought that if I brought it myself that would give you more confidence, because if I can get in here, then surely that proves that you can get out?"

"Yes, I appreciate that," said the Arab. Then he paused. "Forgive me," he said, "but all this is rather sudden: we had almost given up hope, you see. What night were you considering as suitable to carry out . . . this operation?"

"It depends," said Barry, "it depends upon you, and on several other factors, too . . . including a boat."

"Ah yes, the boat is mentioned in the letter. Am I to assume that you will take us direct from the coast of France to our own country, then?"

"Yes."

"But the coast is almost two hundred kilometres from here."

"Exactly. That will be the difficult part. If you agree, my idea is to give you a sign when we are ready."

"A little song, perhaps, outside the walls, or the graceful imitation of some bird?"

"No," said Barry, somewhat taken aback: he was unaccustomed to flippancy in Arabs. "Nothing so complicated as that. There is a small hill outside: I have just come down it. The hill is covered with gorse. On the appointed day, someone will drop a white handkerchief in the gorse. At two o'clock that same night all you have to do is walk to the corner of the vegetable garden. There you will find a rope ladder waiting for you. You climb this ladder . . . I catch you in my arms: ten minutes later we are all in a car, and miles away."

"Unfortunately, there may be more than two of us," said the Arab.

Barry considered this for a moment: "That makes very little difference so long as you can keep quiet," he said, at length. "And the best way to learn how to keep quiet, of course, is to practise . . . and practise every day. One of you should stand near the guards' dormitory while the other goes up and down the stairs until you're certain you can do it silently."

"You are a resourceful man, I perceive," said the Arab.

"That is what I'm paid for." Barry laid the bloodstained towel upon the bed-rail. "Now, if you've no objection, I should like to

see Moulay Hassan himself. My time is short. I have not only to get out of here, but well clear of the neighbourhood by dawn."

"I appreciate that," said the Arab. "If you will wait here a moment, I will acquaint Moulay Hassan of your presence, and show him the letter. He is not a young man, you understand, and he might be alarmed to see a stranger, suddenly, at this time of night."

"That's another thing: people keep telling me he is no longer young," said Barry. "It might be a good idea if you let me know, once and for all, just how old he is? Then I can have suitable restoratives ready in the car."

The Arab smiled. "None but the Prophet knows his age exactly," he said, "but I can promise you he is quite young enough to climb a rope ladder if there is liberty beyond the wall." He paused, his hand upon the door-knob. "I leave you alone," he said, "but not for long. This is a wise precaution."

"I sincerely hope so," said Barry politely.

As soon as the door had closed, he did two things which he had been itching to do ever since entering the room. First, he proceeded to the other door, the one in a corner, near the window; laid his ear against the panelling and heard, as he had expected to hear, the sound of women whispering . . . *seek-a-seek-a-seek*: then, since he was invariably a magpie when left alone upon strange premises, he examined, separately, every single compartment in a large chest of drawers, pocketing in the process a rather pretty coral necklace which attracted him, and a volume of the Koran bound in white calf-skin. The Koran was not by any means the only book in the drawers: there were dozens of others, all in French, and all with the same kind of title . . . *Le Baiser de Feu* . . . *La nuit Sadique* . . . together with numerous photographs proving conclusively that fat persons of both sexes may too possess gymnastic powers of which they have long remained in ignorance.

Barry wondered whether the French Government paid for this supply of erotica with which to divert its unwilling and yet virile guests, and if so what sum was set aside each month for the purpose, and under what heading.

His speculations on this theme were abruptly disturbed—only just giving him time to close the last drawer—by the return of the Arab. The Arab's manner was now more affable.

"He is dressed now, and anxious to see you."

The room into which Barry was now introduced was an almost exact replica of that which he had left: a large double bed adorned with brass rails and knobs, a few easy chairs, much cumbersome mahogany, and sombre window curtains. Clearly, whatever might be the generosity of the French Government in the matter of their guests' private eccentricities, this generosity had not been extended to the question of their physical comfort: the furniture in this room, indeed of the whole house, might have been purchased second-hand from the less expensive bedrooms of some provincial hotel.

Moulay Hassan, who received his visitor standing, and with a courteous bow, was a grandson of that Shah of Râisuli whose diversion it had been in the early years of this century, before the Algeciras Conference put a term on such activities, to place captured Europeans in a pit together with a number of *alacrânes*, or Spanish scorpions. The bite of this creature, yellow in colour, inoffensive in appearance, is never fatal, but it is so excruciatingly painful that men, receiving the puncture of that barb, have been known to run, screaming, for several miles until overcome by sheer physical exhaustion. "Let the heathen be fed with the produce of his own country so that he may be encouraged to return to it," the Shah is said to have remarked when well-meaning persons ventured to cast doubts upon the benevolence of his conduct. He was referring, of course, to the curious zoological fact that the *alacrân* is unknown outside the continent of Europe—indeed, he was obliged to import supplies—and the sting of the African scorpion is altogether more benign.

That Shah had perished by an assassin's knife one morning when he was leaving the central mosque in Tetuan. Twelve years later his son had perished beneath the knife of a French surgeon who was operating upon him for a kidney ailment. With these examples before him, within his own family, of the march of progress, and of the modernisation of his country, it might have been expected that Moulay Hassan would have eschewed political activity, but such could never be the case because intrigue, the desire and the ability to command and influence his compatriots, were in his blood: that blood which had endowed him not only with tortuous yet perfectly authentic descent from the Prophet, but also with cousinhood, in one or other of the many degrees of

consanguinity, with every reigning family between Sfax and Agadir.

He had been banished twice to the Sahara, once to Nautil in Mauretania, and once, by the Spanish, to the Chafarina islands; and if he now found himself in France, and not Tahiti, this was possibly because the French preferred to have him near at hand against the next occasion when they would find themselves obliged to depose a Sultan: for there was a definite school of thought at the Quai D'Orsay which maintained that the best way of dealing with the devil was to appoint him God.

Barry, who had met many Moroccans in his time, but none of such exalted ancestry as this one, was immediately impressed by two things: the first, Moulay's air of imperious decorum, which was so statically portrayed that his face resembled rather a wood-carving than living flesh; the second, his absolute equanimity when confronted with what was, after all, a startling occurrence in an uneventful life. Allah had intervened, he seemed to say, as indeed it had long been Allah's bounden duty to intervene: there now remained only the tiresome formality of interrogating, then making use of, Allah's chosen and probably unworthy instrument.

"I am most grateful for this visit," he replied in answer to Barry's salutation. "I have read the letter. I accept the proposition made to me, while reserving to myself full liberty of movements and of action when I return to my own country."

"Such matters are outside my competence," said Barry, "but I've no doubt you will have opportunities for full discussion later." He had been studying his prospective guest, from the moment of his entrance; less from the point of view of the man's past and of his political activities, than with regard to his ability to climb a wall unaided, and to run, if necessary, a hundred yards through gorse. Moulay was at least sixty, but he appeared to be both strong and wiry; and, in any case, there was, even at this hour of night and in these unexpected circumstances, a shine of fanaticism in his eyes which promised ample compensation for any lack of physical stamina. True, there was, upon another plane, the question of attire: the white flowing *haik*, and cowl, which both men wore, was supremely unsuitable for movement at night, but Barry knew better than to insist that they wear European clothes, which he would in any case have found difficulty in providing. He comforted himself with the reflection that this was a matter

which could be rectified as soon as he had them both safely in the car and that, with the aid of the tomato plants and the general garden mud, they would both be well camouflaged by the time they reached the wall.

"I ask only," he said, "that you obey my orders until I have you safe on board the boat."

"So be it," said Moulay Hassan. Was he smiling? Barry could not be certain: the eyes gleamed, but the mouth did not move; the aquiline features were still as a death-mask. These patrician Arabs had always reminded Barry of cultivated mushrooms, or perhaps of those palm fronds, bleached by months in darkness, which are distributed to the faithful on the Sunday which bears their name: Nature had provided these men amply with epidermal pigmentation; a distaste for outdoor life, and a horror of emotion had gradually eliminated it, so that in middle age their faces were often paler than those of white men, and pale not with a sickly but with an inner pallor: the bleach of categorical refutation.

"So be it." Moulay Hassan turned aside, not with discourtesy, but as if to show that the interview were at an end, or so it seemed to Barry.

He was to be quickly disillusioned. The great revolutionary's gesture was inspired by modesty, and unwillingness to discuss his private affairs in person. The secretary, it now appeared, had been delegated for that task: the man cleared his throat, glanced apprehensively at his employer, then began:

"There is one small difficulty . . ."

"Yes?" said Barry patiently. He walked over to the window: the sentry had not moved from his position beside the gate. Downstairs, all was quiet.

"Moulay Hassan does not wish to leave this house without his concubines."

"His what?"

"His concubines."

"How many are there of these ladies?"

"There are seven. They are of various ages."

"I can well believe that, but it is quite out of the question. Living with them every day, you must surely realise the amount of noise that seven women can make? Besides, even if they did reach the wall, there would be no place in the car for them."

The secretary stared at his master's averted back. "You are

confronting Moulay Hassan with a tragic dilemma," he said.

"I can't help that: he should have remained celibate."

"A terrible fate may overtake these helpless creatures if we desert them."

"I hardly think so. If you are referring to the guards, they have all probably spent many years in North Africa and so, long since, satisfied any curiosity which they may have had concerning Arab women. Besides, they can defend their virtue."

Moulay Hassan turned. "This is not a subject upon which I will endure pleasantries," he said. "This is a grave matter affecting my honour as a Caïd."

"I quite understand that," said Barry. "But do *you* understand what would happen if you are caught, as you certainly would be with seven women on your hands? Do you realise that, in all probability, you wouldn't simply be brought back here, but shut up in a fortress—and without any concubines at all?"

"I accept the risks."

"It's not a question of risk but of a collective promenade about as far as the nearest potato patch, by which time every guard in the house will be out there to ask you what you think you're playing at. No . . . I'm very sorry . . . but I want no women on this trip."

"In that case," said Moulay Hassan suavely, "I regret that I shall have to refuse the offer of your Government."

"You can't do that!" said Barry. He was aghast. Why the devil hadn't Aranjuez, who thought of everything, not foreseen this development? He thought rapidly. "Listen," he said, "I'll take one . . . *one*, d'you understand, and no more. Don't try and play on my feelings: I haven't any. Personally, I think you ought to put your country first," he added virtuously.

The two men looked at Barry, saw that he was in earnest, then went off into a corner of the room to confer. They spoke in low voices. Presently they returned, their manner bashful.

"You do not realise the predicament in which you place us," said the secretary.

"One," said Barry firmly.

"How can Moulay Hassan choose? It is not democratic."

"One."

"What will the others say, what will they think of us: the ones we leave behind? And the jealousy, the arguments?" The man's

voice was vibrant with feeling. "Life in this house, already, is far from calm: what will be our existence now?"

"Nonsense. There is no need whatever for you to inform the lady of your choice until an hour or two before the actual departure."

"But the one whom we choose may not wish to come. Then we shall have discussions, tears, even scenes of violence perhaps."

"I can't help that. A man who had over fifty concubines when he was in Meknés ought to be able to deal with a mere seven now."

"We had expected greater sympathy from you." Both men stared at him reproachfully.

"I don't see why. I have no concubines. I am a bachelor; and if I may make another suggestion it is that you impress upon your eventual companion that this is an escape, and not a holiday. I expect her to turn up without baggage of any kind except, perhaps, a spare veil."

Moulay Hassan had by now resumed his former air of impassivity. Not so the secretary: his hands fluttered with despair. "Some of these women are from great families," he pleaded. "Accusations will be brought against us when we reach Morocco."

"I've had enough of this," said Barry. He displayed an index finger: "One, do you hear, and don't try to double-cross me by bringing two, or there'll be trouble. And now, I'm very sorry, but I must go. It's getting late, and I've people waiting for me."

But at this point something most unfortunate occurred: it was not exactly that Barry was agitated, but certainly the conversation, the last part of which had been conducted at a pitch of voice far above the decorous whispers of the outset, had to some degree unsettled him, and now caused him to move with less than his usual circumspection.

Stepping backwards, Barry sent a lamp-stand crashing to the floor.

For a moment the three men stared at each other in horror. Then they listened: and, to be sure, the tramp and tap of several pairs of running feet could be clearly heard, mounting the staircase.

The secretary was the first of the trio to react. "Quick," he said. "Out at once . . . through the window."

"Don't be a damned fool: it's a twenty-foot drop," said Barry,

exasperated. "Hide me . . . go on, think of somewhere! Then make them go away."

He looked about him. The bed was too obvious, the wardrobe too small; to set foot in the passage quite out of the question. "Oh, well, I've mucked this lot up properly," he thought as he drew his gun and released the safety-catch. Barry had no desire, whatever the solution remaining to him, to eat lentils in French prisons, so this was obviously the only way. He would shoot at the legs of the first bastard who entered the room, and the others would no doubt scuttle, with himself hard on their heels . . . if they didn't, if they tried to argue, then so much the worse for them: some real shooting would begin. Barry's chief hope was that the alarm might be as yet, only internal, confined to the house; because, of course, if the sentry by the gate ever joined in the fun then there would be no holding Marjano, who must, for some time now, have been growing anxious at the long and inexplicable delay.

Barry was so preoccupied by these thoughts, and with his preparations for the coming struggle, that he failed to observe that the two Arabs had been whispering excitedly together. Now, however, he was obliged to pay attention to them because Moulay Hassan, grown deathly pale, was shaking at his shoulder:

"Go in there," said Moulay in a voice charged with emotion. He pointed to a door in the corner; a door similar to the one in the secretary's room, and no doubt communicating indirectly with it. "Go in there, and keep quiet. I will deal with these brutes."

"But . . ."

"Do as I say . . . go in there . . . and, remember, *you are upon your honour as a gentleman.*"

Barry had no leisure to enquire why this title to gentility should have been invoked. Already, men were beating on the door: indeed had not the secretary prudently turned the key at the last moment, they would have been already in the room:

"*Allons . . . ouvrez-moi ça . . . qu'est ce qui se passe . . . pourquoi vous n'êtes pas au lit?*"

There must have been at least three men outside. Barry did not wait to hear the Arabs' reply to them. He opened the door indicated, closed it quickly behind him, and found himself in pitch darkness which smelt strongly of musk.

From the first moment he was frightened, as rarely in his life: and ample reason had he to be frightened.

Even as he peered at the darkness looking for the window, a woman screamed; another followed suit, improving upon the sound emitted by at least an octave; a third woman giggled; a fourth, not yet awake, snored heavily. Christ, thought Barry, I'm in the bloody harem . . . what a game . . . he had never felt more thoroughly exposed to danger since Thornton had shot at him once, ten years before, by mistake, in a Greek wine cellar.

He stumbled forward only to discover that free floor space was limited. The room, which could be no larger than the one from which he had just fled, was to all intents and purposes a dormitory. Whichever way he moved—backwards, forwards, sideways—he barked his shin against a bed, and now the hubbub became indescribable, because to the women's shrill, repeated cries of fear, and to the battering of soldiers' fists farther down the passage, Barry's own curses, hoarse, and quite explicitly obscene, were added.

"Ladies!" he appealed at last, in Arabic, profiting from a moment of calm, and realising that no progress could be made except by parley. "Ladies . . . peace . . . I beg of you. I mean you no harm. Can someone not turn on the light?"

"No . . . never," replied at least three voices, tremulous with indignation.

"But you must have heard me talking with your master. I am not an enemy."

There was silence. They were now, apparently, in conference. Then:

"Come here . . . keep quiet. Do you not hear those men outside?"

A swimmer seized by an octopus could not have felt a wilder fear, a more ghastly apprehension, than Barry at that moment. Arms, and it seemed ever more arms, reached up for him, tugged at his own arms, at his clothing, clawed at him behind the knees, until, with all possibility of resistance overcome, he toppled forward, plunging head-first into bedclothes, amidst writhing bodies sheathed in cotton night-dresses.

My God, he thought, they must sleep three in a bed: then he stopped thinking for the time being because he was far too busy defending himself: somebody had put a pillow over his face, perhaps to prevent his talking . . . someone else, more kindly

disposed, was covering him with blankets . . . the toe of a particularly persistent foot was butting at his waist, urging him to move over and make room, but no sooner had he done so than another, even more vicious, foot came into play butting him back again.

Barry abandoned the honourable but unequal struggle. He lay still. He surrendered: reflecting that although his situation could undoubtedly be described as delicate, some compensations were included—he was warm, he was armed, and the musky smell which he had noticed when first entering the room proved, upon this more intimate experience, by no means unpleasant to his nostrils.

"Feel . . . Oh look, *feel*," said a voice, suddenly. "He has a moustache."

"Nor is he bald, at least," said another voice; and hands, some dry, some warm and clammy—but all inquisitive—tugged at his hair.

"I must say, this speaks badly for Moulay: you'd think they'd never even seen a bloody man," thought Barry. However, he allowed them to do with him as they pleased because to lie supine was so obviously more prudent. He did not even try to raise his head from beneath the pillow because he discovered that, when he was allowed to pay attention to it, the conversation in the next room was perfectly audible from his present position.

In the next room the secretary had apparently, after some delay, opened the door, and a discussion with two of the guards was now in full swing.

Not even among Prussians are the limitations of the military mind more conspicuously demonstrated than in the conversation of French non-commissioned officers:

"Pourquoi t'es debout comme ça . . . dis-moi un peu. Pourquoi t'es pas au plumard?"

"I believe we have a right to talk," Barry heard Moulay Hassan reply. "May I remind you that you are not merely our gaolers, but also to some extent our servants."

"Ne prends pas ce ton avec moi, vieux bouc, ou ça ira mal. Tu te disputes à cause des filles . . . hein? T'es jamais content. Tu en as sept, et tu chiales parce qu'il te faut soixante-dix."

"Soixante-neuf, tu veux dire," said the other soldier.

And both laughed. They were not really suspicious, but having

been woken up by the clamour they were now determined to be unpleasant, and also, if at all possible, to obtain sensual satisfaction by forcing their way into that secret place: the women's bedroom.

Several times they attempted this, and several times Barry heard the dull thuds as the secretary flung himself against the door, denying them passage in a fine vocal mixture of objurgatory Arabic and forensic French.

So that all this went on for a long time: for half an hour at least before the men withdrew, and even then a further half hour passed before Barry deemed it prudent to leave his hiding place: quite apart from the further ten minutes which he was obliged to spend in negotiating a conditional release from his invisible but only too palpable captors.

Barry did not speak to Moulay Hassan and the secretary when at last he emerged, nor did those two long-suffering men address a single word to Barry. They stood with heads averted; no doubt from the overpowering smell of musk which surrounded him as does, they say, a saint the chaste aura of sanctity.

Mariano, who was cold, grumpy, and perturbed, did not welcome Barry with any great enthusiasm:

"Where the devil have you been all this time, *hombre?*"

"Well, I'm not by nature modest, but in this case . . . I hardly like to say."

"I can tell you one thing: this is the last time I stick around in the cold like this. Next time I'm coming in with you."

"Yes," said Barry. "I don't ask you to believe me, but I was regretting your absence only a few minutes ago. You would have taken quite a load off my mind."

Mariano lifted his head. He sniffed. He looked about him: at the wall, at the ditch, even at the medlar tree. Then he sniffed again, and this time, undoubtedly, he was sniffing Barry.

"There's something curious about you," he said.

"I? No . . . I promise you I'm just like any other man," said Barry.

Two days later, both these men were in Madrid.

Aranjuez did not seem particularly amused when Barry recounted the details of his adventure. Indeed, Aranjuez had

manifested a certain petulance of temper from the outset of the interview.

"I wish you wouldn't take my agents off their designated jobs," he said. "I had to transfer a man from England to replace that one."

"I was only acting for what I thought to be the best."

"You were doing nothing of the kind: you did it purely to assert your independence."

"Your wife must suffer, doesn't she?" said Barry. "I mean the way you see into a person's mind."

"I married my wife precisely because she has no mind." Aranjuez looked at Barry sharply. "Anyway, how do you know that I really have a wife?"

"It's written in little lines of love all round your mouth," said Barry. "Besides, last time I was here, I followed you into the *Retiro* one Sunday morning. D'you remember . . . you were with three of your kids: '*Don't walk on that grass, Juanito . . .*' '*Now, Jaime, you mustn't touch the flowers.*' Why can't you talk to me like that? I'm sure I'd never touch a flower again."

"You irritate me beyond measure," said Aranjuez. "A Cervantes would be necessary to describe my emotions when your presence is announced to me. And now I suppose you wish to keep this man."

"I do. Besides, if the operation is to take place in two weeks' time, it doesn't seem too much to ask."

"Very well . . . and may I ask what you intend to do during those two weeks?"

"You may," replied Barry amiably. "Since you tell me that Thornton is getting on all right with the boat, and there is nothing else for me to do, I thought I might take a little holiday. I rather want to see Toledo. All the guide books say that is the thing to do."

"My guide book says that Barcelona is a most interesting city," said Aranjuez. "Why don't you go there?"

"Ah? And why should I do that?"

"I was thinking that perhaps you might like to make the acquaintance of Señora Thornton . . . purely in your private capacity, of course."

"You surprise me," said Barry. "Personally, I would have thought that a man of your delicacy of feeling would have realised

that this was perhaps not the most happy moment for her to encounter her husband's best friend."

"Yet I think it might be so, all the same," said Aranjuez. He rose. He walked over to the panelled wall at a point about six feet distant from his desk. "Do you like aquariums?" he said.

"I like everything that you like," said Barry.

"In that case," said Aranjuez, "perhaps you would be good enough to place your finger here, and to press . . . ~~no~~, not here . . . *here*, please."

Barry placed his finger upon the point indicated to him. The panel slid, laterally; disappeared from view, revealing another panel, but this one made of misty, mica, glass.

"Don't worry," said Aranjuez. "This is science. We see: they don't."

Barry saw a small man, about fifty years of age, with pungent brown eyes, and a Galeries Lafayette suit, who was reading a François Mauriac editorial in the *Figaro*.

"Is this device expensive?" he said. "Do tell me that it is . . . there is nothing I like better than to hear of public money wasted for the amusement of *educated* people."

"That man," said Aranjuez, "is the Inspector Poinso, from Marseille, whom I ~~once~~ spoke to you about. He will come in here when you leave."

"He looks most intolerably miserable, if you don't mind my saying so. Could it be your Spanish cooking?"

"Men are often miserable," said Aranjuez, "very often miserable, when harried by an *idée fixe*."

And he accompanied Barry politely, but implacably, towards the door.

"So: will you visit Barcelona?" he said.

"I will consider the idea."

"You have too much money," said Aranjuez. "I shall have to see what can be done to trap you into paying income tax."

"You must do as you please, of course," said Barry, "but most of my spare money has been invested in the Prudential Assurance Company, whose device, as perhaps you know, is a picture of the towering fortress itself, accompanied by the pledge: '*As safe as the Rock of Gibraltar*.' I therefore beg you *not* to take Gibraltar away from us! You will undermine England if you do so. Please don't say that you really need Gibraltar, because if you

do we may be obliged to give Honduras to Guatemala, as well."

"The patriotic impulse is incalculable," said Aranjuez. "We observe it in the virtuous: it shines brightest, as your Doctor Johnson, said, in knaves."

"And in fools," said Barry. "In fools, who seem unaware that they must shortly die."

"I shall be at Horcher's at nine o'clock to-night," said Aranjuez. "Would you care to join me? We shall be alone. We shall have, perhaps, a very interesting conversation."

"Yes. I will be there."

"Did you have a nice time with that young lady in Paris?"

"That is where people like you always go wrong . . . *you* people: you remind me of those North Americans. Life just isn't life unless you drop me of one of your little bombs from time to time," said Barry. "Divorced from life entirely, you're worse . . . far worse off than the business man doing his thirty years hard labour between the suburb and the city. One has to give to *him*, at least, the respect which one accords a monk . . . but you . . . oh you *never*."

"I didn't think that I could make you talk like this," said Aranjuez.

"It's as so damned, stupid, futile, that ~~it~~ probably only you who could," said Barry.

Thirteen

THE COLUMBRETE ISLANDS, a small archipelago of volcanic islets and shoals, lie about twenty-eight miles south-south-eastward of Cape Oropesa, on the Spanish coast, and about forty-five miles distant from Majorca, nearest of the Balearics. The islets are in most places steep-to; the greater part of their coasts is inaccessible, and in winter the north-east winds which prevail in that area raise heavy and confused seas about the group.

The various islands have charming names. One is called El Bergantin—the brigantine—and, indeed, seen from a distance, it does resemble a square-rigged vessel under sail. Another is called

El Cerquillo, which is the Spanish word for the tonsure worn by monks and priests. Still another island is La Horadada, which word, to nice people, means 'perforated', but to the fishermen, whose forebears named it, conveys a somewhat different allusion. Those medieval fishermen, it may be said in passing, showed a most becoming modesty, christening with their own names, not the larger islands, but only the shoals and reefs which surround the group . . . Jorge, Juan . . . Joaquin, and many others.

During nine months of the year, the Columbretes are uninhabited except for the personnel of the lighthouse on Columbrete Grande—three men, housed in pleasant, modern quarters: and in radio communication with their base at Castellon. In the period of high summer, however, many craft visit the group for the lobster fishing, and the crews of these boats have built, for their use when ashore, several strange habitations, circular in shape, cousins to the Eskimo igloo, and to the ancient Scottish bothy.

During the four years of his activity in the Western Mediterranean, Barry had employed the, to him, favourable geographical situation of the Columbretes for various purposes. The long haul from Tangiers to the French coast; the necessity of casting a course at least two degrees of latitude east of Cape Palos, the sharp snout of Spain which proclaims, in the visages of its inhabitants, the brotherhood of that seaboard with the Levant; the further necessity of steering east by north until he could be quite sure that he had once more eluded the Spanish Customs cutters, based behind Cape Palos, in Cartagena; the morale of his crew, never at any time elevated: these, and other minor factors, had led Barry to make of the Columbretes a depot and a staging point, second only in importance to his main base, at the Cala Alfaufa, in Minorca.

Indeed, Barry had done more: his relations with the French wing of his organisation being intimate and cordial, he had upon several occasions, and in order to oblige friends in Marseille, put the Columbretes to a use for which nature and their remoteness from the great world had so clearly designed them. A hooded figure, securely bound, would be embarked by him, at night, in some Provençal creek; this same figure, no longer bound but gesticulating dismally, to be disembarked thirty-six hours later, with a keg of water and a tin of ship's biscuits for provisions, on La Horadada: there to await rescue by the next fishing boat and

the subsequent complications with the Spanish police which invariably precluded, and delayed, the safe return to France of each of these reluctant Crusoes.

And it was said of these men, whose identity remained a secret to Barry, that never afterwards could they be persuaded to eat mussels, nor, indeed, any other shell-fish; the collection of this healthy form of food having been the only means by which they could, while in exile, vary the monotony of the hard tack which formed their diet.

Before his negotiations with Aranjuez had placed the seal of semi-legality upon the movements of his boat in Spanish waters, Barry had avoided Columbrete Grande, the main island of the group, not wishing his presence in the area to be reported by the lighthouse keepers. Now, however, a different situation obtained: employing the elliptical manner which characterised him when giving an assurance, Aranjuez had conveyed to Barry the information that the lighthouse personnel had received instructions that they must provide whatever hospitality might be needed, and had been further told to keep their mouths shut when relieved.

When despatching Thornton to take command of his boat in Tangiers, Barry, whose confidence in the latter's seamanship was not unlimited, had therefore instructed his subordinate to proceed immediately to Columbrete Grande, which alone among all the islands offered a safe all-weather anchorage. Once safely there, he was to lie up, and to await Barry's arrival.

In point of compass fact, Thornton's navigational ability was not so markedly inferior to that of his friend, though he lacked, of course, recent practice, and had been nervous during his first two hours at sea. But Thornton had learnt his sailing, in youth, in the turbulent west of England waters of Lyme Bay, had forgotten much, then learnt all and more, again, aboard *caïques*, in the war-time Ægean . . . and it was aboard just such a *caïque* modernised and much improved, it was true, by Barry, who had bought it six years before in Ikaria . . . familiar to him, as were the members of her crew, from a previous and more momentous voyage, that he lay now, with his child aboard, and a new, baffling, and unsatisfactory mistress for the consolation of those many hours when he was not standing, a heavy, temporary, and undecided figure, somewhere on the lichen-covered lava which formed the central saddle of the mile-long island.

"Won't you take me?" Maruja had said. "Wouldn't I be best for you . . . wouldn't I?" She had been able to look at him in that steady way, without remission, or any change of face or mood: not the slightest swivel of her gaze, because she loved him: "I could be useful with Barbara," she added, although she knew that to say that would annoy him.

"Can't you understand?" said Luis, who was present at this exchange of signals set in codes without a key, "can't you understand that you're the girl he comes back to . . not the other, not the girl for now."

Maruja had looked at Luis; then "If only I could hate you," she had said.

"You can't hate me, my child," Luis had replied. "The thing which is best for you is not to tease young men because of your unfortunate infirmity, but to come to me on Saturday and Sunday evenings when we have cakes, then coffee, and many old fat persons who are past your stage in life."

Luis would have said more, but Thornton interrupted him. "I'm giving you the shop, Luis," he said.

Luis was silent, and Thornton saw the things, the ignoble things, which Luis hit upon their head, as they surfaced from the mud where they had lain so long . . . so long, so cosily.

"Why do you want to do a stupid thing like that, Desmond?" he said. He had called Thornton many things, but never 'Desmond' before. "Aren't you ashamed to leave?"

"No. Why should I be?"

Luis had shrugged: "Oh, well, if you can't see, there's no point in my explaining. Never mind: I'll look after the place for you," and, turning to Maruja: "Come, child, put up the shutters, but don't think you're going home yet. We have the inventory to do."

Thornton, too, had an inventory of sorts to make before leaving Barcelona. Having heard that José Beltran was ill in bed, he had called to see him:

"Well, how are you?"

One had to be careful with Beltran . . . one had to sit back: sometimes when he looked most ill he would throw aside the bedclothes and dive at his visitor in a rugby tackle. A great part of his reputation resided in the fact that he had done that to Jacinto Benavente.

Beltran was sitting up in bed, wearing an old grey dressing-gown. He had not shaved for many days, and would not shave for many more: until he recovered sufficient strength to rise and pay a visit to a barber's shop. Thornton had often considered it curious that this man, so neat, even pernickety, in his dress when seen about the town, should in the privacy of his home allow himself to appear so unkempt, and even dirty. But, then, many aspects of Beltran's character appeared curious to Thornton: the ferocious cynicism patchworked by moments of tenderness; the detestation of the Catholic Church, which was carried to such a point that, whenever he saw a priest or a nun approaching, Beltran would cross the street—his passage through Barcelona, a city inhabited by ten thousand priests, being therefore an endless series of zig-zags, a form of progress which had reached its apotheosis during the recent Eucharistic Congress, when he had been unable to set foot abroad at all; and, finally, his cult of Proust, which, although Beltran suffered not from asthma but from a far more deadly ailment, had caused him to line the walls of his bed- and sitting-rooms with cork, in imitation of the Porte-Maillot master.

"I am relatively well," he said in answer to Thornton's question. He then pointed to the cuspidor beside his bed. "At least I am able to spit up every day some part of what is poisoning me. Others—the bilious, and the liverish—are not so fortunate."

He laid aside the proofs of the book which he had been correcting, for even when ill and in spite of the fact that his employers, who admired him, would have continued to pay his salary in any case, Beltran liked to preserve the fiction that he was invaluable to them by occasional piece-work of this nature.

"And you: are you well?" he said. "I suppose not, you have so little to be well about." He gave Thornton a searching, a clinical look, a look which he had no doubt adopted for his use from one of the many doctors who attended him. "And what is this I hear about you and Nuria Herédia?" he said.

"Ah? Have you heard something?" Thornton did not much care what José Beltran heard: he heard so much, so many little tit-bits every day himself; charming little anecdotes about night-clubs, and young love, and horses.

"Yes, her brother was here the other day," said José. "The diplomat, you know . . . I think I told you about him once."

"I hope you gave me a good reference."

"Naturally! I spoke warmly in your favour. I had never considered myself as a matchmaker before, but now I can see that the trade has possibilities. I shall open a marriage bureau—though perhaps marriage is hardly the word—and so enable many Lonely Hearts to get in touch with one another." José Beltran put his proofs aside. He touched Thornton's hand. "Though, seriously, Desmond, I should advise you not to make *too* many enemies," he said slowly.

"Why . . . is the brother my enemy?"

"No, but he is his sister's, so it comes to much the same thing. A woman scorned is bad enough, but an idol whose feet of clay have been discovered is far worse—and that particular brother's feet aren't even of clay but of a substance which I'm too polite to mention."

"That night you came to dinner, you said . . ." began Thornton.

"Ah, that happy, happy night . . . how times have changed! Yes, what did I say? It may not have been true."

"You mentioned something about a shooting during the Civil War," said Thornton.

"So I did; and I'm glad you've not forgotten it, because it will explain to you why I have a special interest in that family. Nuria adored her brother. Then he did something very dirty to her, something quite appalling about which I would certainly tell you if my artistic nature didn't warn me that it would make a more effective scene to allow her to tell you by herself."

"And so now they are *fachés*?" said Thornton.

"Yes, they are very *enfadados* and that is the reason why, since I imagine it is rather your pride than your affections which is engaged, that I think you were unwise to book an extra ticket to Tangiers as you did yesterday morning."

Thornton was sluggishly startled. "How do you know that?" he said.

José was pleased with his instantaneous fuse effect. "My dear Desmond," he said, "a really malicious man like me has always innumerable friends, though in this case, I'm sorry to say, the explanation reflects little credit upon my widespread network. The man who sold you the tickets is my cousin, and happens to know you by sight." He fingered the proofs. There was a strike among compositors . . . well, let us say, since strikes are

forbidden in Spain, a small difference of opinion. The book had been set up by enthusiastic Catholic Boy Scouts. The result was in his hands.

"I should have guessed he was your near relative," said Thornton. "He tried to sell me lottery tickets, too!

Beltran smiled at him. "What a pity I'm not well," he said. His glance shuttled between the Sacred Heart upon the wall, behind his head, and Thornton. "For then I'd be able to take part in these exciting activities." He paused, took up his proofs again. "But then, if I enjoyed good health, I mightn't like you, Desmond. No . . . No . . . I'm almost sure I wouldn't . . . almost sure we'd hurt each other very much."

* * * *

The three members of the ship's crew were known to Thornton from his previous trip in her. They were, in order of importance: Horst, the German engineer; Paddy Corcoran, who was Liverpool Irish and, like his employer, a British Army deserter; and, finally, Henri Steenbergen, a Fleming, who had once been a well-known light-weight boxer, and who claimed that he would have been European champion but for crooked referees. Steenbergen served as cook, the Irishman as deckhand. All three men slept forrard. All three men, too, were personally devoted to Barry, but more often than not they were upon the worst of terms with one another.

To a Thornton well briefed in sea-dog diplomacy, they gave reluctant allegiance in navigational affairs—more especially when they saw him raise and appear to understand the manipulation of a sextant—on the tacit understanding that he would not interfere with the routine of the ship, except at sea. To Nuria Herédia they offered no allegiance at all: indeed, they never spoke to her except in minatory Alexandrines . . . "Mind my bucket, lady, can't you" . . . "Hold tight there, or you'll be overboard; and don't think I'll come after you."

The reason for this contumelious behaviour was that they had often borne women before, and never, in their consideration, to any useful purpose. It had always been Barry's constant practice to bring his successful girl friends—he had been increasingly inclined to favour, for the past eighteen months, ladies who were past their first youth, and often, it must be said, broken-nosed, or

pock-marked. He brought these ladies with him, the crew thought, upon the principle that if he could endure the company of a woman for a week in the cramped confines of the after-cabin, then she was unlikely to prove a nuisance—or rather, not until several months had passed—should he decide to establish her as Penelope to his Ulysses, ashore.^f

The crew had become reconciled to Barry's mistresses—they had, after all, never seen the same face twice—as representing an amiable, if insipid, quirk in the character of a man whom they respected. They had grown embittered, however, by the occasional presence of other and less welcome passengers: fashionable whores who, finding their vogue declining in, or their ambitions grown too large for, Tangiers or Oran, paid Barry good money for clandestine passage to the new and alluring world of France; older women, probably also whores, although not in present exercise of their profession, who were set ashore in Minorca or at some other point in the Balearics; there to disappear, if their conversation was to be believed, in urgent search of husbands long unseen, or of lovers who had left them with a child ten years before.

The crew disapproved of these women; in fact, of all women. Wives they might possess, indeed, in every port—and did possess, particularly Corcoran—but there was neither excuse nor room, they felt, for venery afloat. Themselves come late, and accidentally, to the seafaring career, these three men shared with amateur yachtsmen the rolling gait, the contemptuous stare bespoke for landmen, and the garbled chat of technicalities which distinguishes that body. Most sailors have a finicky old maid crouching in them somewhere, and Barry's crew were the more attached to their ship because, in a world of exile, the *caïque* represented, for them, the one element of security . . . a darling thing, a cruising home, not to be dishonoured by the clatter of high heels upon her decks, or by shrill laughter which disturbed the merited *siesta*.

This prejudice against passengers did not extend to children and, from the first, Barbara had been the crew's favourite; at once their plaything, their pupil, and their mascot. True, they would have preferred the child to be a boy, but, dressed in blue jeans, with her yellow hair clipped short by Corcoran and the lining of a greasy yachting cap stuffed with paper so that it might fit her head,

Barbara's sex characteristics tended to pass unnoticed until, with the camouflage of grime and fuel oil, she might have stood with authenticity upon any burning deck.

Barbara was, in fact, disgracefully spoilt, both by the crew and now by their unscrupulous rivals in her affections: the lighthouse keepers—and if she had learnt many new and useful things, such as how to splice a rope, and cook a mushroom omelette, and curse alternatively in Flemish and Gaelic, she had also, since she did none but the most perfunctory of lessons, forgotten even the first elements of algebra.

"Give it me," she would say to Corcoran. "I want to read it."

"Sure, it isn't for you, Barbara darlin'," the Irishman replied, tucking a paper-covered volume entitled *Oriental Nights* behind him, and assailed by long-forgotten thoughts of Sunday Catechism and of the hell fire which awaited those who corrupted the innocent.

"If you don't let me read it, I'll go up to the lighthouse and play draughts with the keepers again."

And so Corcoran would give her the book, and since his library was extensive, Barbara was now almost as well acquainted with the vagaries of the white slave traffic, and the intricacies of love as practised in the hot sands of the desert, as he was himself.

Curiously enough, although this had been a problem which had plagued him for years, and concerning which he had felt an almost perennial sense of guilt, Thornton was not at present painfully exercised by thoughts of his elder daughter's future. There being neither French nor English *pensions* in Barcelona, he could not, once he had taken the decision to depart, have abandoned Barbara to an opportune and timely boarding-school; while her knowledge of the language was still too sketchy for it to be feasible to place her in a Spanish one. True, he could have confided her to Maruja, who would have cared for her with love and understanding—but that would have been to impose upon himself a debt which he had no means of redeeming; and upon Maruja herself a task, if not beyond her powers, at least more severe than he could with equanimity envisage.

Often, observing Barbara, Thornton would surprise in her a gesture, a turn of speech, even an entire attitude in confrontation with the world, which reminded him with a vacillating, anxious joy of her mother, Gloria; and then he would reflect that possibly,

although he could claim no virtue for himself, this careless and haphazard way was the *best* way to bring up a daughter of that remarkable and unhappy woman; the errors and reverses of whose life had been, he had always considered, directly traceable to the imposition of a cheerless Presbyterian childhood upon a nature born for generosity and laughter.

And he was the more at his ease in thinking thus because Barbara's character, although stubborn, was unusually frank and open. There was seldom need to punish her, and reproof, when given, was accepted not with sulk and stamp of foot, but as one of the small hazards of life to which human beings under five feet in height were inexplicably but constantly exposed by the obduracy of adults and their belief in obsolete shibboleths of conduct. Nor, Thornton knew—and this facet of his daughter's character gave him more pleasure than any other—was his child, as are many little girls, deceitful: an angel to her father but a fiend behind his back.

Moreover, whereas many children are, by the very nature of their dependent role, possessive little Shylocks in their demands for love, jealous of intruders, Thornton now observed, having the recent example to set beside the present one, that Barbara was entirely indifferent to his relations with women . . . that she evidently presumed that it was necessary—even advantageous to herself in so far as it afforded her an opportunity of studying the behaviour of female adults—that her father should have ladies about him, whose activities were occasionally diverting but always reassuringly impermanent . . . but that such matters were of small consequence when set beside the deeper understanding pertaining among persons who shared the same blood.

And Thornton now realised that Barbara's long guerrilla with Dominique had been inspired, not by dynastic, but by personal motives. Barbara had not *liked* Dominique, and had liked her still less when the latter had attempted, as she had been obliged, to assume the role of mother.

The infant mind, so fabulous in certain respects, is in others curiously literal. Perhaps when she had been required to address her stepmother, no longer as '*Maman-Dominique*', but henceforth as '*Maman*' *tout court*, Barbara had revolted, and, like an over-taxed electorate, had clamoured for a change of Chancellor.

Perhaps .

But one thing seemed secure to Thornton: at some time, at some unidentified moment—that moment mist-wrapped now in retrospective sentiment—remarking an expression upon her father's face, or suddenly aware of a strange new pulse and shot inside her own small heart, Barbara had decided that in this matter of women and Desmond her own allegiance must now go, and eternally, to that dead woman whom only the unconscious part of her mind could, occasionally at night, see clearly: and then as a blur in a bed, a half-empty bottle, and a bakelite ashtray too small for the crimson-edged butts with which it overflowed each dawn. . . .

Men hide their secrets in a meshwork of fables, and why not . . . why should they not do so, for what are they, in effect, saying to each new acquaintance but: *"This is what I would prefer to see myself. Please say that my story does not seem to you inconsistent with my new and, I swear to you, renovated character?"*

Steenbergen's jaw had been fractured, professionally, in a ten-round fight with a Senegalese in Casablanca. As he reached the canvas Steenbergen had suffered the further misfortune of fracturing his skull. At first it had seemed that Steenbergen, who was already twenty-eight and well past his best, would die, and the Senegalese had gone so far as to order, and pay for, a wreath.

Steenbergen did not, however, die, though he was afflicted from time to time by excruciating headaches, and these had recently become frequent . . . much more frequent. He spent two months in hospital, and on his discharge he learnt that his manager had long since departed, together with the prize money and Steenbergen's not inconsiderable savings. It would have been possible for Steenbergen to have returned to Antwerp, and there either to have sued or to have killed his manager. He rejected these solutions. The state of his health was such that he lacked the intellectual vigour required to pursue them, and since, furthermore, he knew that he would be unable to fight again, both had appeared to him as equally derisory. Later, more particularly at the onslaught of each new headache, Steenbergen regretted his inactivity, but it was now too late for such thoughts: the manager was in America. He was still apparently managing fighters, and he had also, as a sideline, purchased Turkish baths in Chicago. This

struck Steenbergen as very ironical because it had always been his own intention to open such an establishment when the time came for retirement.

Steenbergen had spent two dire, disheartening years in French Morocco; then he had crossed the border into the Spanish zone and it had been there that Barry had found him one night standing on a jetty in the harbour of Melilla, and staring at the black water and the green slime upon a quarantine buoy. As a matter of fact Steenbergen had come to the jetty to make sure that the depth of water was sufficient for his purpose, and did not propose to drown himself until the following night, when he would be ejected from the room which he occupied in the Arab town; but he never told Barry this detail because he did not wish to hurt his benefactor's feelings.

At the present moment, which was about eleven o'clock in the morning of February 23rd, 1953, Steenbergen was sitting astride a canvas stool on the deck of the *caïque* and peeling potatoes. He knew that Thornton was watching him, but he did not feel inclined to make conversation. This was not unusual. He was a silent man, though not taciturn except in pain. He did not even speak much to Barbara, but he would perform small chores for her, and make her things. For example, he had yesterday made her a pair of clogs, and she had now gone ashore with Corcoran for the express purpose of showing these clogs to the lighthouse keepers.

Actually, Thornton was not looking at Steenbergen at all, nor at Horst, who was painting the fo'c'sle skylight, nor even at Nuria, who had set up her painting materials on the saddle of the island, and whose white dress and easel were clearly visible, although more than two hundred yards away. No . . . Thornton was looking, as usual, at himself; or, more exactly, at what he could learn about himself from the lives and the conduct of the various people, not excluding the three lighthouse keepers, with whom he was now living.

It was really very extraordinary, he thought, divagating for a moment, turning like some nurseryman from his perusal of the holy soil to examination of the strange weeds born in that soil . . . very extraordinary how well Nuria managed her relations with Barbara. From the first there had been peace, blessed peace, and, so far as he could see, a peace accompanied by a mutual and

progressive disarmament. No longer need to cringe in daily anticipation of the mind-breaking scene, the accusatory tear, the well documented charge of partiality.

Why was this, he wondered; yet the obvious solution—that the exacerbatory threat which Barbara and Dominique had appeared to constitute, the one for the other, no longer obtained in, nor could be duplicated by, the present circumstances—this solution was, to Thornton's queasy conscience, unsatisfactory.

"Do you really like her?" he had said to Nuria only the previous evening, referring to his daughter.

"Yes, of course I do. Besides, I've every reason to like her because she's prepared to tolerate, even to like, *me* in that strange, remote way of hers. As far as she's concerned I came in just at the right moment."

"And if somebody else had come in?"

"I dare say it would have been much the same thing. This trip, the new surroundings, play their part in it as well, you know." Nuria had been cutting bread at the time but had paused then, knife in hand, to stare at him. She could be very didactic: "Anyway, you must get rid of the notion that a child is something static. Week by week they grow, and this one must have grown enormously in these last two months alone."

Did she mean two months by oneself, or just two months' passage of time, he wondered. All around him, language was becoming increasingly inadequate.

Thornton had never thought of the problem from that point of view. He felt much obliged to Nuria, whose opinions concerning many things, expressed incisively and in terms which he could comprehend, appeared to him most sensible. He had observed, too, that although she sometimes, as it were, could be seen reading, and even commented upon, the signposts, the notices which flanked the forbidden territory, the world of wife and child, she never ventured to set foot within that dangerous and mined preserve.

But she influenced him in other ways, in many other ways: so that he debated in the night whether he were not become as a chameleon, taking new colour with each new patch of light and shade; and like that overestimated creature taking camouflage most ineffectively, its desire to look like the yellow sands prompting no deeper feeling in the puzzled naturalist than a query as to

whether insects, too, did not suffer occasionally from jaundice.

Though he had only to think of Dominique and Geneviève, or *not* think, strive not to think when wanting to; and all was as before, and daily just a little worse.

However, there were certain small advantages: in the old days if he had gone on, flogging a conversation to death, leaving nothing unsaid because he could leave nothing alone to mature in its own good time or, alternatively, to perish by inanition . . . he would have been quickly called to order, very quickly.

Not, as last night, when he had added, his voice as awkward as his face: "And you and me? What are her true feelings, then, about that?"

"I don't believe she has any deep feelings about it at all," Nuria had replied. "If she finds me pretty, then I dare say she's well pleased enough, just as if I were a new suit she liked you in, or some other . . ." she had looked at him and smiled, "some other thing that you bought ready-made. But children are not *intrusive*: they're the politest people in the world. If she saw you kissing me she would think it very vulgar and bad-mannered on your part, but no more."

Thornton looked across the little bay, towards the island. Nuria was painting, her head bent, her whole attitude, even seen from this distance, one of absorption in her task. Someone—it must have been Fife—had once told Thornton that however big a damned fool a man was, and however irreducibly untalented, he would always find an acute pleasure in painting, no matter how revolting the daubs eventually produced.

"D'you mean pleasure in the sense that Titian or someone must have felt it?" Thornton had asked, incredulous. Yes . . . he remembered now: of course it had been Fife, and the answer, in every sense, characteristic:

"More . . . much more . . . poor Titian knew what he was doing." And so do you, of course, Thornton had thought, but in no unkindly manner; thankful, indeed, to be spared one of Fife's literary smiles. "*And so do you*" . . . that remark had been made well over a year ago: hearing it now, Thornton would perhaps have spoken his then silent answer aloud, for Fife so emphatically did know where he was going . . . had he not written, and had accepted upon terms which were once known as those of immediate publication, a novel which described in detail, down to

the last plate thrown, and the final, apple-pie bed, Spanish style (that is to say, a full-grown and uprooted cactus pressed flat between the sheets)—a book which described, in no small olfactory detail, his lengthy relations and his final break with a young woman named Pilar, with whom he was, in fact, still living, because timorous concerning the possible behaviour of her family if he broke?

Thornton had begun to dislike Fife actively only some time after the latter had made, with all the courage of a regular soldier firing from well entrenched positions upon guerrillas endeavouring to deploy in the wild bamboo, some verbal sorties which, at any time, had they been pursued to their logical terminal, the local police station, might have cost Thornton his decapitated head in a wicker-basket, and Dominique a struggle with her conscience as to whether she should, in view of her other commitments, claim the two pieces of her first husband's body for burial in consecrated ground.

Thornton was still looking at Nuria, and sometimes at Horst, but he was thinking, not of them, but of Fife. The very last thing that Fife had said to Thornton before the latter had left Barcelona for Tangiers had been, meeting him by accident in the *Marfil* bar:

"I suppose you know that I've been posted to Corunna?"

"No, I didn't. Congratulations." "*You've stabbed me in the heart properly there, you bastard,*" he thought, "*but perhaps you don't know it.*"

He was to be more accurately informed, immediately.

"Weren't you always saying," said Fife, "that it was at Corunna that you wanted to end your time in the Service?"

"It was Corunna," said Thornton. "It was just as you say. Did you have a lot of trouble fitting the noose for Brazil round someone else's neck?"

He left it at that: nor was there any apparent disposition upon Fife's part to exchange further crude broadsides, heavy with metal, feather-weight with science. They parted politely.

"*Of course, I should have said that from Corunna, which is about as far, in time, by rail, from Barcelona, as is Berlin he would surely have more difficulty in managing my life,*" thought Thornton in his spattered way. "*Why didn't I say that? Why do these damned fools who live for the soft caress of the next scratch on their back always win?*"

Could it be true, he thought—these things were so curious; and he then thought that only because he had decided, for some irrelevant reason, to walk the two kilometres home, instead of taking the No. 23 tram or the underground, in either of which forms of transport the clarion idea of self-preservation from the prevailing crush would have abolished that of self-analysis: the latter exercise so inimical to one's peace of mind—could it be true, therefore, that because Dommy was gone, he was becoming hateful, petty, one with Fife and people like Peter Cherr, Freddy's husband?

He had been more upset than he realised by Fife. He had been so upset that he forgot to give the ritual *real* to the old lady with the paralysed arms who spent the afternoon hours with a tin cup on the corner of the Calle Mariano Cubi, not thirty yards from where he lived. He had several times seen this woman washing plates energetically, with flying hands, in a bar where he sometimes played billiards, in the Calle Carolinas. But that did not matter: her deception was unfortunate, but it was less hateful than that of Fife.

"He thinks England is a man with a bowler hat and an umbrella, who, unless he's quite sure of the company he's keeping, won't say what school he went to—but I always thought of England as a rather buxom, freckled girl with some golden-eared wheat sticking out of her bodice; and the ears of that wheat tickled you every time you bent down to look."

Steenbergen was on his last potato, but Horst was far from finished with the skylight. Gently, his brush at first tentative upon the woodwork, he dabbed and stroked.

"Could you cease, perhaps," he said, "to pace up and down? I scrubbed that deck an hour ago."

"I'm sorry," said Thornton. He had not realised that he had been so irritatingly mobile. It did, indeed, occur to him to remark that the only dirt which he could have deposited upon the deck would be that which had adhered to the soles of his bedroom slippers from the after-cabin carpet, unswept these seven days; but he did not say this because he knew Horst, knew him very well.

Thornton's profound uncertainty about himself had taken two successive forms, in each of which it was natural that he should cast about in search of parallels and oblique, and therefore tepid,

comfort. Certain formulæ of self-interrogation, and in particular those presupposing culpability, are peculiar to our age. Throughout his life, except in childhood, Thornton's nights had been free from all save waking dreams, but now this was no longer so: the unconscious, oppressed too implacably, rose in ragged, uncontrolled, but sustained and general revolt, and so weak was the resistance to the encroachment of one world upon another—this latter grown tawdry like a once resplendent arm-chair, by constant misuse—that sometimes dreams remained reality until as late as the midday of the next morning.

Souvenirs . . . oh, souvenirs; but not the nice ones, only those which caused the too famous and not entirely metaphorical knife to twist in the even less metaphorical wound . . . souvenirs of the denunciatory dream in which the taxi-driver, once thought to be one's friend, claimed an extra five *pesetas*—which the dreamer did not possess—for excess baggage carried inside . . . a trunk containing . . . well, what, precisely? Somebody's corpse no doubt, since that was now the atmosphere in which the dreamer dreamt.

The mole, with scampering and busy feet, does not know why he burrows, nor why in the thin and treacherous northern spring-time he must erupt beneath a certain patch of turf, uncut and undisturbed, perhaps, since polygamist King Harry's time. The moth must *know* that pyromaniacs are about, but she continues to fly round and round the flame. The captive leopard may make disdainful clockwise circuit of the greasy bars, and thrills the passing children with his fangs uncovered by a yawn, but he cannot change his spots.

"I'm going ashore," said Thornton suddenly.

Horst looked up. "Who'll bring the dinghy back?" he said.

"Corcoran's ashore, too," said Thornton. "If he doesn't turn up soon, just give me a shout. I won't be far away."

"That Corcoran is not to be trusted with a child," said Horst reprovingly. "Yesterday I saw him climbing a cliff with Barbara. This is dangerous." He resumed his painting of the skylight.

"Come, pay no attention to this German, who is merely jealous," said Steenberg. He rose. "I have prepared your lunch."

He went below, appearing again a moment later with a picnic basket. He opened this, disclosing his wares. "Those long things

are sausage rolls," he said. "I made them this morning. In the thermos there is white wine, though this may taste of tea. You must therefore be tolerant."

The dinghy lay astern. Steenbergén hauled the little boat alongside, handed down the basket to Thornton when aboard, and then cast off. Horst did not lift his head to watch these proceedings: he had but a single master.

Thornton began to row. The dinghy scudded through smooth water; black water above rock, pale green where masking sand. Columbrete Grande, about 1,200 yards in length, is crescent-shaped. The harbour lies between the two wings of the crescent, one of which is extended some distance seaward by outlying rocks. The harbour is called Puerto Tofino, but in spite of that resounding name offers no facilities, except a buoy moored in the centre of the bay. On the contrary, lying open to the north-eastward, with foul ground near its head, Tofino affords little real shelter, and in a full easterly gale the bay could prove a death trap; a fact impressed upon Thornton by Barry, whose instructions were that in this event the *caïque* must stand out to sea immediately.

But at present the weather was calm, although often overcast. Light airs alone ruffled the waters of the bay, and the lighthouse men, consulted, maintained that this state of affairs would continue until the strong Levantine winds set in towards the end of March.

Looking back as he rowed, Thornton saw that the two men aboard the *caïque* were leaning on the fallrail, watching him, and when he raised his hand and waved, Horst, surprisingly, waved in return.

Thornton smiled. Of the three members of the crew, although he liked them all, Thornton had conceived a more special affection for the German as being, despite his often bearish manner, the most emotionally vulnerable. One did not need to waste part of a precious, ever dwindling capital of sympathy upon Corcoran, because Corcoran, well named, indeed was one of nature's corks, and the more tumultuous the whirlpool the more merrily would he bob and bounce, as he had bobbed and bounced his way out of the British garrison in Austria when certain imminent disclosures concerning his misuse of canteen funds, and the mutual recriminations of the four young women to each of whom he was officially engaged, had made it advisable for him to seek another field for his activities.

But with Horst one felt as one might feel in the presence of a deaf mute, or of that of a man who has suffered, through no fault of his own, terrible injury in some industrial accident: the occult punishment appears the more unjust because beyond the measure of the victim, beyond the power of his fortitude to bear, and Goethe, who had known every possible predicament in which his compatriots might be placed, had diagnosed that of Horst when he declared that laughter, tears, joy and grief were all first cousins; and that he could conceive of no greater torment for certain men than to find themselves alone in paradise . . . to which he might have added that there was one torment greater still, and specifically Teutonic: namely to be painfully exercised by empirical questions of philosophy, and at the same time to be aware that one did not possess the intellectual equipment necessary for their comprehension.

The dinghy's prow rasped upon coarse sand. The picnic basket toppled from a thwart. Thornton disembarked. He looked back once more at the taller of the two figures aboard the *caïque*. "The poor bastard's rather like me," he said, "though, of course, upon a much more elevated plane."

And he chuckled—but not at what he had just said, but because he had suddenly realised that he was always talking to himself these days.

* * * *

The central part of the island was low, less than fifty feet in height, and composed of lava and rock. With the picnic basket slung over his shoulders Thornton mounted. Nuria, intent upon her work, had not heard his approach. He laid the basket at her feet.

"Aren't I nice?" he said. "I saw you shivering through my binoculars, so I brought you a sweater." He handed it to her: it was one of his own sweaters.

Nuria laughed: "That isn't a sweater: it's a suit of armour. If I put that on, I won't be able to lift a finger, much less paint."

He looked at her canvas. She was painting a view of the southern extremity of the island and of the off-lying rocks. To Thornton it seemed rather good, and especially good her treatment of the sea. She had been working since eight o'clock that morning. "Let me fix it round your shoulders, then," he said,

holding up the sweater as if he were a salesman and quite determined to dispose of it at a reasonable price.

"All right." She bent her head. He tied the sleeves loosely round her neck.

"Now you'd like me to go away, I dare say?" he said.

She smiled at him again: "You mean you've something else to do?" They had only been together five weeks, but already she knew him well.

"No—but it isn't lunch-time yet, and I don't want to disturb you." Actually, he *did* want to go away on this occasion, but quite often he was well content to sit beside her, watching her face as she worked; or rather, would remain so content for half an hour: after which time he would grow restless, begin to whistle, to throw small stones at other, larger stones, and so, progressively, exasperate her.

"How polite you are to-day?" she said, and, leaning forward, touched his nose quickly with her wet brush, then just as quickly kissed the smear of paint.

He examined the brush. "Well, I'm glad it wasn't red," he said, and licked a handkerchief, then wiped his nose with it.

"You won't need any artificial red if you stay too long in the wine cellar at that lighthouse," she said. "Promise me you'll be good."

"Oh yes," he said.

"Oh yes," she mimicked him. They were talking in French. Her English was adequate, but insufficient for a prolonged or complicated conversation, nor did she care for him to speak to her in Spanish, claiming that, although his accent was reasonable enough, he possessed no background in that language. "You make more effort than most foreigners," she had said, "but I refuse to talk my own language to somebody to whom Canalejas or Calderón are street names," and when he had protested, saying that he had read many of the latter's plays, and was even acquainted with the career and tragic death of the great Liberal statesman, she had merely laughed, and replied: "Yes . . . yes, I exaggerate, but you know quite well what I mean . . ." and curiously enough he *did* know what she meant, and it was perhaps rather more than she supposed: for, her family being Philippine and, moreover, Catalans, resettled in Spain only since the war with America, she was intensely nationalist in sentiment.

"Well, I'll be off," he said now. "If you get hungry—eat. If you need something just wave your arms about. Somebody's sure to see you."

"Wait!" she said, and, putting down her palette and her brushes, she took up from somewhere in the scrubby grass what at first sight he took to be a daisy chain, but upon closer inspection what he saw was, although indeed a chain, one composed of smaller flowers, very common on this island, but of which he did not know the name.

"One good turn deserves another," and she hung the garland round his neck. "Now you look altogether Bacchanalian," she said. "Most suitable." She touched the flowers with her fingertips, adjusting them. "I made you that," she said, "before I started work, while I was thinking what to do, and how to do it."

He smiled. The lighthouse keepers would make scabrous jokes. He did not care: it was these unexpected gestures—unexpected by him—that he liked so much in Nuria. She reminded him sometimes of a big girl, nearly grown up but not quite so, at a children's party: of a big girl who played all the children's games quite as well as they did, without condescension, even with enthusiasm, yet who yet contrived to retain, even in the most frenzied slipper hunt, a curious and pleasing decorum.

He kissed her, and began to walk up the hill towards the lighthouse. When, after covering fifty yards, he turned his head to look, she had already resumed her task.

"You don't work enough," she had told him: "I suspect that's been your trouble all your life. You must create enthusiasms; they won't appear behind your head like tongues of pentecostal fire." She was in no sense a professional painter, but having exhausted the possibilities of the boat, and even of the island, she had fallen back on this, as the most suitable of her many hobbies, for these particular hours of idleness.

Thornton climbed and as he climbed he reflected that what was so unusual in the relationship between himself and Nuria was that both of them had entered into it—as if they had been persons contemplating a marriage of convenience—without any illusions concerning the motives of the prospective partner, and with none, or almost none, concerning their own.

Thornton had wished to make the gesture of forgetting that

which he knew very well he would never be able to forget. Nuria had desired to escape from the cramped moral confines of Barcelona, from the immediate tyranny of her family, and from the more distant but quite as pervasive tyranny of moral laws the more intolerable because, in her heart, she subscribed to them.

The answer, in Thornton's case, since women and alcohol were the only obnubilatory agents of which he had knowledge, was a woman who would involve him in no commitment and to whom he would cause no hurt; a woman as emotionally unscrupulous as he believed himself, henceforth, to be. The answer, in Nuria's case, was a man, and of necessity a foreigner, who would take her away, far away from a city grown each year more unendurable to her because full of her former school friends, now married, and of her former dancing partners, now fathers of five.

At the outset—and from the first they had talked frankly—the pair had several times debated to what extent—or, more exactly, at what stage—Aranjuez had planned, foreseen what now appeared to each as a natural, inevitable development; and they were agreed that it must have been from the first moment; from the day, in fact, when Aranjuez had instructed Nuria to take the night express to Seville.

Initially Thornton had found difficulty in believing in Nuria's sincerity at any stage. So when he had invited her to accompany him to Tangiers he had done so cynically and in the conviction that he might as well take her, who suited his own private purpose, as travel alone, to discover on board, as the agent appointed for his surveillance, somebody else who did not.

But all that had been before Thornton had learnt the true nature of the hold maintained by Aranjuez over Nuria, before he understood that she had never had any option but to obey the command to encounter him, as if by happy accident, in the train, before he knew any but café gossip concerning the nature and circumstances of her past life.

That knowledge came later, and with it came, to both of them, the first impulse towards solidarity, the first movements towards revolt. Inasmuch as, disagreeable as it is for people to embark upon a course of action knowing that their motives are selfish and, for this, and ancillary reasons, impure: their situation becomes even more disagreeable if they consider that, far from playing willingly at dupe and duped, they have been throughout their

transactions merely puppets whose behaviour has, in some cases, been correctly predicted, in others virtually dictated by the mind of a malevolent third player.

Nor could they be sure that Aranjuez was not present with them now, that he did not divine their thoughts, follow with amusement their gathering resentment, refrain from action only because he knew them to be powerless against him. Thornton had told Nuria nothing of the true reason which bound him to Aranjuez. Officially, he was aboard the *calque* because Barry was his friend, and because he liked the sea, but Nuria, who had known Aranjuez for five years, did not need to go beyond her own experience of his methods to make a better guess.

And so they had played, or tried to play, a game of which they had themselves, in joint and solemn consultation, supplied the rules. They had never, for the good reason that it lay in utter discord with their two characters, played that game before, and therefore they did not know that it is a game so difficult to sustain—and so tedious—that, at one stage or another, it is almost always either abandoned, or so modified as to make its rules indistinguishable from those of another and simpler game, and one even more traditional.

He did not realise until much later, when he saw the whole affair at last in retrospect, that she had performed for him a service of quite inestimable value; she had salvaged, and then assuaged, his pride; though some might have thought, as he came to think himself, that it had not been his pride at all, but only his bruised vanity. The truth, no doubt, lay somewhere in between, like the water between the sliding palms of Pilate. "It seems to me," she said once to him, "that nobody has ever taken any interest in you, and this to such a point that you grow immediately suspicious when anybody does. You remind me of a piece of quite good land which, if it had been put to use in time, might have provided the farmer with many a ripe harvest. It's too late now, of course. The weeds are well entrenched. Yet even now, if I burnt those weeds down, grass would grow, and then I could pasture several dozen goats on you quite comfortably."

At first, when she made remarks of this kind, he did, in fact, look at her with suspicion, and this was because, being less immediately intelligent than she, and much less perspicacious, he had always taken their game most seriously: indeed it was

necessary for him to adopt that attitude, because otherwise he would have been obliged to judge himself dishonest.

His point of view presented the admirable simplicity of all lines of conduct which are based upon a single illusion and a colourful variety of false premises. Once again, he had mistaken frankness for integrity made manifest.

"Since you do not mind," he would have said, had she constrained him to formulate his inner thought in words, "and since this arrangement seems to be of service to you, as it is to me, then I confess most willingly that you save me, by your presence alone, from a hundred follies, many of them sensual, which I should have undoubtedly committed—and which, committed, would have removed the last justification for the plea of extenuating circumstances to which I still like, sometimes, to think I have a right."

That she was beautiful, possessed of most engaging manners, that she appeared to like and take an interest in him: these things might please and flatter, but they also profoundly alarmed him. "You are forgetting rule three," was, in effect, his reply to her. "Not only are you forgetting a rule, but you don't seem to realise yet how dreadful I am." and in order that she should remain under no misapprehension he would give stolid and entirely humourless display, for hours at a time, of various selected defects from his fascinating character—though, God knows, he was under no obligation to put himself to so much trouble, because his faults would all have been glaringly apparent to a Trobriand islander within half an hour of making his acquaintance.

When he behaved thus, Nuria always laughed at him. Then he would be obliged to laugh, too, and that did him good, for he began to realise that people who laugh at themselves, but who do not allow others to laugh at them, are reducing their performance to the level of a private religious rite and are, in fact, as pretentious and as tiresome as people who cannot deride themselves at all.

What went on in Nuria's mind was in some ways very similar, but since women think elementally and not in complex, more unholy-than-thou periods, and do not feel remorse except fleetingly, and even then with remorse for feeling it at all, the situation between them, as it developed, presented itself to her differently.

She had chosen him. The association might prove to be *sans* a

to-morrow, but meanwhile what was surely most important was to forget the motives which might or might not have led to one's choice, and to make the best of existing conditions.

Nuria liked Thornton. He amused her. She was too intelligent not to realise that much of this amusement was imputable to his foreign birth, to the fact that his ways, his attitude of mind, even his faults, were unlike those to which she was accustomed. But Nuria had put intelligence, together with the critical faculties and the weekly strictures of the Dominican Father Martinez, the director of her conscience, aside for the time being, and was now on holiday in a world where no malicious tongues could tattle at her unjustly tattered reputation, because none knew her identity; a world where well-bred young ladies were not obliged to leave the drawing-room door ajar when speaking, alone, with gentlemen; nor instructed by their brothers to be home at ten o'clock unless they could arrange a respectable escort for a later hour; nor even condemned to eternal spinsterhood because, too proud to insist upon discretion, they had made no denial when accused of having been for scandalously long, and far too publicly, the mistress of a married man.

As Thornton climbed the hill towards the lighthouse, he looked back from time to time. Nuria appeared to be painting. She was not, however, painting. She was watching him with the aid of a small hand-mirror. Although there could be no doubt that this was a very silly thing to do, she had decided that it would be interesting to see how many times he did look back.

Thornton looked back seven times before he passed out of sight behind a clump of rock. On four of these occasions he had paused to admire the view, or to regain his breath. Thus, he looked at Nuria only three times.

But Nuria did not know this, which shows how cursed even clever woman can be when they choose to blind themselves to the sad, constant realities of life.

Nuria put the mirror in her pocket, then picked up her palette. She was well pleased with her picture.

Behind the outcrop of rock Thornton came upon one of the animals, a cat, with which he had peopled the island.

Three dogs, three cats, all one-time citizens of Tangiers and

well known to warehousemen upon that city's waterfront, had been his first and instant choice; two females of each species, and one male, their captor's ignoble intention being to provide a new twist to the problem of the eternal triangle. He had succeeded even better than he had intended because the dog was much smaller than the bitches and in consequence an unhappy victim of prolonged and painful erithism. There had been some difficulty in capturing these animals, and some grumbling by Horst during their transportation. Now, however, all seemed well, and these members, at least, of the first fauna which had inhabited Columbrete Grande since the second Ice Age seemed to be partially acclimatised to their new and startling situation. The dogs, it was true, were still inclined to lurk about the lighthouse refuse dump, to stand upon the beach at the disembarkation point offering mournful howl and whine in the direction of the *caique*, and Thornton allowed Nuria and Barbara to bring them food, even gave the beasts scraps himself—although this surreptitiously because officially his policy was that one must be cruel in order to be kind, and that the sooner the dogs learnt to 'live off the land', as their ancestors had done, the more rapidly would they breed a new race, independent, fearless, massive as the wolves of Tuscany.

So dogmatic was Thornton on this subject that Nuria once informed him that, given the necessary scientific training, he would have made an excellent and obedient Soviet geneticist. "You don't understand," he retorted, with sovereign indifference to environmental circumstance. "Two of the three fathers of the English stud book, including the Darley Arabian, were hacks pulling carriages in Whitehall . . ." And when Nuria remarked that the evolution of thoroughbred racehorses upon Newmarket Heath was a rather different matter from that of mongrel dogs on Columbrete, he would point to the cats, any one of which could be seen, as now, scurrying away at his slightest approach. "You see . . . you see," he said, "there is a truly independent animal: a simple change of circumstance, and it reverts to nature. One day people will come here to see the black breed of mountain lions, which I originated."

Thornton had also landed, and released upon the northern wastes of Columbrete, close to the Punta Michorn, eight white mice and half a dozen rabbits. Time alone can divulge that secret. Therefore, Thornton had bought massively, relying upon the law

of averages to effect his purpose. The mice had been released in pairs at various points. None had since been seen, and Nuria was so unkind as to suggest that they might, in their inexperience of the wide open spaces, have fallen victims to the cats. But Thornton would have none of this: proudly he pointed to the first somewhat amateurish burrows, thrown up here and there by his rabbits. He had persuaded the lighthouse keepers, who possessed rifles with which they sometimes shot at porpoises, to refrain from all attack upon the rabbits until six months had passed.

The cat encountered now fled instantly and fast. Her benefactor was in no way perturbed: he had other and agronomical interests with which to occupy his mind. Two years previously, while on holiday in Minorca, he had been employed by some scientific gentlemen, too decrepit to undertake the task themselves, in a search for a lost *talayot*, one of the prehistoric dwelling-places in which that island abounds. Thornton had found the *talayot*, which had been named after him, and he considered his success upon that occasion as one of the few worthwhile achievements of his life.

Here, however, to-day, upon his barren island, last prolongation of that chain of volcanic mountains which begins in the Moroccan Riff, curves north to the splendours of Granada, and then eastward to Cape Palos and the sea . . . here on Columbrete, where in a million years no plant save coarse grass, thistles and lichen had ever grown . . . here would be the scene of greater, more imaginative and anonymous achievement than that of simple discovery. One might lose one's wives and wreck one's life, possess neither the prospect of, nor the desire to enjoy, a comfortable and happy future . . . one might be the prey of vain regrets and endless retrospective shame, and presently one would die and be some letters on a tombstone and, for a little while, the casual subject of a dry laugh or an unfriendly shrug . . . but of what significance was that when one could console oneself with the resplendent thought that, in years to come, men who landed on this island would take shelter from the rain and sun beneath the olive and carob trees which one had planted, vary the monotony of their diet with the wild vegetables found to be so mysteriously abundant upon the sheltered southern slopes, solace their jaded eyes with the sight of iris, daffodil and fuchsia, and

their parched throats with the oranges planted not ten yards from the landing place?

Thornton had explained all this quite seriously to Nuria, and she, at first inclined to mock at such ideas as ridiculously romantic and childish had, little by little, as she witnessed the fervour which he devoted to their execution, ceased to mock and become at last herself enthusiastic. "You do understand, don't you?" he would say. "Any damned fool could think of bringing animals here . . . but plants and trees . . . no, that is really worthwhile. Whatever happens now or later, I shall always be able to think of this, to feel what I've planted growing, spreading. Isn't that nice . . . isn't that worth doing? Or do you think it's just selfishness and vanity again?" He was always consulting her now about his conduct in face of this or that contingency, many of them trivial. Having overestimated, and for so long, his capabilities in so many directions, he seemed to her to overestimate them now, again, in this, his last stand against the circling Indians, in believing that some part of his behaviour could still hurt people. "I think," said Nuria, always practical, "I think that you should have stuck to plants and trees, and cut out the animals. If the lighthouse keepers take into their heads to import a herd of goats now, they'll eat everything. You should have brought some deadly nightshade with you."

"It isn't poisonous to goats," he answered authoritatively. He had spent so many hours in the nursery of a market gardener in Tangiers that he now considered himself to be an authority upon all agricultural matters.

"If only we had a secure supply of dung." He had issued an order that all the refuse from the boat must be collected, not thrown overboard, so that he might transport daily buckets of the malodorous but saving sludge, for the nurture of his flora.

Sometimes when he saw Nuria kneeling, implanting in shard-strewn and ungrateful earth an olive stone or a grain of maize, he would look at her Uccello back, foreshortened for his close inspection, and wonder what Dominique would have said and done in those same circumstances . . . and once, in the night, he had sat up in his bunk and laughed—a curious sound, second cousin to a sob—because some dream, immediately and most conveniently forgotten, had left him with an urgent telegram to remind him that he had killed and now was being pursued for

having killed the imagined lover, but for reasons which, when examined, seemed inadequate had failed to kill or even hurt the real one.

"It isn't right to bring shrubs or trees already a year old. Everything should be grown from seed," he said once to Nuria.

"Oh, don't be so damned stupid," she had said. "You can salve your conscience with your olive stones and carob seeds, can't you?"

This was very true. The olive stone, the carob bean, when planted, gave green, imperious shoot within two weeks. Much of Thornton's precious water, tetchily transported by him in bucket and lighthouse slop-pail went to feed those virgin roots; and not to feed, alas, the two orange trees, the silhouettes of which, when the British Admiralty took the trouble to survey the group anew—they had not done so since 1898—would be seen as twin humps upon the skyline, set in the margin of their chart; the authentic pencil blur of some two-and-a-half-ringer who had great respect for Mercator, but none at all for Rembrandt.

Would the tomatoes prosper, how stood matters with the globe artichokes? Like some more benevolent Sennacherib, his thoughts far distant from rapine, Thornton looked down upon the renovated fold; in which Nuria was a white and central dot, and certain other smudges near her, upon binocular inspection, respectively identifiable as two young broom bushes, *depaysés* emblems of an unjustly supplanted Britannic dynasty, and, in third place, five degrees to starboard, a couchant cat, squatting with comminatory line of haunch upon a cliff, and pretending, with a dignity inherited rather than acquired, that she had no desire whatever to capture and maim any member of the group of seagulls who, from time to time, when they grew tired of circling in the blue—would dive down to dive-bomb her accurately, and almost within reach of the frenzied, deadly, claw, with their droppings.

Thornton's approach had not passed unnoticed, and now the head-keeper of the lighthouse appeared with an invitation to come inside for coffee. This head-keeper, Giménez by name, was a man of about fifty years of age, a native of Tarragona. There was nothing remarkable about his appearance, which suggested that of a small tradesman rather than a person connected in some way with the sea, but he enjoyed a happy notoriety in the service—

and, indeed, far beyond it—by reason of certain tragic events which had occurred during the Spanish Civil War.

During that conflict the loyalties of the three great Balearic islands had been divided, Majorca and Iviza passing in the first days of struggle beneath Nationalist control, whereas Minorca had remained until the end Republican. Neither faction considered it worth while to occupy the Columbretes, but that one or other must eventually do so was made necessary by the fact that there existed only a six-months supply of fuel and food in the lighthouse, which, then as now, was manned by three men, of whom, then as now, Giménez had been the Chief.

Giménez possessed no strong political convictions. Moreover he was, at that time, unmarried, and although he had a brother and a sister living in Tarragona, he had also a brother and sister living in Majorca. It was therefore a matter of indifference to him from which side relief should come.

With his two subordinates the situation was quite otherwise: one was ferociously, and because of the long period of enforced chastity most painfully, in love with a young wife whom he had left upon the mainland, in Oropesa. The other waited only for his next period of leave ashore in order to demand the hand of a young lady resident in the town of Palma, in Majorca.

The political arguments engendered by this situation were violent in the extreme, and Giménez, whose one desire was to live in neutral peace, had been obliged to listen to them all day long.

Men thrown together for long periods become rapidly surfeited with each other's company. Unless they are prepared to show great mutual forbearance a point may be reached when their sanity is threatened.

Such a point was reached one day when Giménez was trying very hard to find the solution to a game of patience. Maddened by a particularly acrimonious argument between his colleagues, he seized a gun and ordered them to be quiet. Neither obeyed. Seeing this, something broke in Giménez's mind. He took aim at the noisier of the two contestants, the man from Majorca, and fired, but, missing, killed the other man instead. From that moment peace reigned, and Giménez, in order to be sure that there should be no further arguments, declared himself enthusiastically for God and Franco.

But this was only half the story. There being very little left to eat upon the island it now became necessary to seek help. It is more than thirty miles from Columbrete to the nearest point on the Majorcan coast, but Giménez, famished but resolute at the thought of a square meal, covered them in two days, alone, in a rowing-boat, having left his companion to guard the light.

An obelisk, simple but shapely, stands to-day near the Majorcan beach where Giménez first set weary foot. Affixed to the obelisk is a plaque recording in moving terms the exploit of this hero who, with none to guide or to advise him, knew none the less where his duty lay so that Spain might be once again a proud and independent nation.

Since those days, radio had been installed in the lighthouse, and now, as Thornton entered the living-room, the second keeper was engaged upon the most important of his duties, which was to report to his base in Tarragona:

"Hullo . . . Columbrete calling . . . Columbrete . . . are you all right? . . . we're all right here . . . over."

There was a silence, then:

"You say it's raining . . . it's not raining here . . . anything good at the cinema this week? . . . over."

The second keeper was not a fascinating conversationalist, and these exchanges although they had once amused Thornton, now bored him. The more important news from the outer world he could hear on the ordinary reception set which stood on the kitchen sideboard. He drank his coffee, was civil for a moment, then went up the winding stairs towards the lantern house, sixty feet above ground level.

Corcoran and Barbara, who were standing on the balcony looking out to sea, made room for him between them.

"There's a boat out there," said Barbara, "and Paddy says it's coming nearer."

Thornton looked. The day was clear. He could see the boat distinctly, although it must have been at least eight miles away.

"They're probably fishing," he said. Other boats were visible, although these were more distant, hull-down on the horizon.

"Plants coming up nicely?" said Corcoran. "I can't wait to get my teeth into a real Thornton-style orange. What d'you say, Babs?" He tickled Barbara's chin.

"I saw a dead mouse on the cliff," said Barbara.

"You eating here or going back on board?" said Thornton to Corcoran.

"Okay," said the Irishman. "I get you . . . you mean the picnic's strictly private. Well, far be it from us to inflict our unwanted presence . . . eh, Babs?"

"*We're* having lunch in the cave on the point," said Barbara sniffily, and she pointed to a brown paper package in the lantern room.

"I hope you haven't been touching anything in here," said her father severely, and quite unjustly, for if anyone was inclined to fondle the mysterious apparatus of the lamp it was himself.

The lamp, of more than 150,000 candle-power in strength, was silent now, but about half an hour before night-fell Giménez would ignite the burner and then this room would be full with a sound as of innumerable bees, and with mysterious clicking noises, too; punctuated every thirty seconds by a weird clang from the driving weights which revolved the cage of prisms high above. The fuel used was paraffin. A whole year's supply of it lay in barrels on the sward outside the lighthouse, and every barrel had been manhandled up the hill from the landing beach. The burner itself was much like a primus stove, surmounted by an incandescent mantle no bigger than a football, so that it seemed to Thornton odd, and to his daughter entirely fabulous, that a thing so small could be visible twenty-three sea miles distant. Yet so it was, and the glare, if one entered the room after nightfall, left one purblind for hours: indeed, Giménez, who had a large stock of stories with sad endings, maintained that many a keeper had grown gradually blind by neglecting to wear dark glasses while servicing the beam.

"That boat is coming nearer," called Corcoran from the balcony.

"In that case we may get some fish for dinner," said Thornton. The mention of dinner reminded him that it was high time for lunch. Looking down from the balcony he saw that Nuria had left her easel, and was waving.

He made his way downstairs.

* * * *

The sand was warm, the picnic basket almost empty. Nuria stretched herself. A supple movement, beginning with her

eyebrows, ran like a lazy wave through all her body until it reached her toes. Most people can only stretch themselves in this way once a day, when waking in the morning, but Nuria could do it at any time, even standing up.

"Mmmm!" she said, with unconscious memories of Suzy Prim. "I feel like a cat."

"I once had a cat," said Thornton.

"Did you? What happened to it?"

"She was born in Brittany, and for four years she went with me everywhere in France. Then I brought her here, and she was eaten by some gypsies . . . some *gitanos*. I never had the heart to get another."

"Oh, how terrible." Nuria turned upon her side, and looked at him through half-closed eyelashes. "I like you . . . I like you," she said. "You shave every day?"

"Doesn't everyone in your select circle?" he said, teasing her.

"Yes, maybe they do, but it comes up again, the stubble. Your beard is more polite. It waits for nightfall." She ran her finger along his chin. "What a pity it's too cold to bathe," she said.

"It's not too cold for you to tell me a story," he said.

She looked at him. "I can't understand why you want to know the details so much. I don't ask you to tell me about Dominique."

"That's because you have no need to ask me."

"And didn't José Beltran tell you?"

"No; he said you would."

"Poor José! Well, all right . . . perhaps I will, but I'm afraid it's not a very tidy drama. Maybe, I'd better begin with the second act, where there's more movement?"

"Begin at the beginning."

She sighed, took his cigarette from him and then returned it: "It was in 1948, just after my father died. I was twenty-two, but not altogether stupid. There were two things in me. I wanted to do something . . . something really worth while. I also wanted to have a good time."

"Are the two desires so incompatible?"

"In a woman . . . yes, I think they are; in this country anyway. And I was so spoilt, you can't imagine how spoilt I was, as the beautiful baby of the family."

But Thornton could imagine that quite well. Other women spent hours before their looking-glasses, but her road to re-

assurance was a different one: whenever she was nervous and a pencil lay handy, she would take the pencil up and write in generous, blurred curves: "*Nena . . . Nena . . . little girl*" over and over again on the nearest scrap of paper.

"Remember," she said. "I was the youngest of four, much the youngest, and so very much my father's darling. I was more beautiful then than I am now and, by God, I knew it. My sister always said that if there was nothing else available I'd flirt with a lamp-post. But I meant no harm. Girls *don't* mean any harm. They're like children, experimenting. They suddenly discover that they have this power, hitherto quite unsuspected, and so they want to see what they can do with it. Men don't know how to flirt at all; only how to make manoeuvres with a prize in view. I often think a lot of the trouble in the world comes from that. It's like beginning to dance a slow fox-trot and suddenly finding yourself involved in a tango."

He laughed. She tweaked his nose. This hurt: he rubbed his nose.

"Oh, you can laugh if you like, but it's true," she said. "Love is such a *limited* fairyland to men, but to women, if only they could obtain more lasting collaboration, it offers all the variegated charms of Paradise . . . one love for this, and one for that, and one for when you take the wrong turning: in fact, just like the names upon a dance card. That's what I used to think then."

"Go on," he said.

"You'll say that the dance is run by the Church. Maybe it is. I think you'll admit that the arrangements are excellent if only there were no gate-crashers and everybody stuck to the rules."

"I'm not saying anything," remarked Thornton.

"No, but you looked it. You believe that the Church is responsible for the way women here . . . well . . . explode, as it were, from time to time."

"I want to know how *you* exploded."

"That's very simple. If my father had lived, I'd probably never have done so because he kept me to some extent in order. I'd been engaged three times and broken it off. Engagements, to me, were merely flirting put upon a more formalised basis. Marriage seemed inevitable, but not immediately urgent. My brothers, I dare say, were inclined to approve of my behaviour, because it had given me a reputation for heartlessness; and that

raised my price in the market." She touched his cheek again: but this time the touch of her fingers was different, because more tentative; indeed, almost timid. "But then," she said, "Papa died, and almost everything was changed as if someone had waved the wicked fairy's wand about. I decided to become a nurse."

"Why?"

"Death. I'd never seen it before. I'd loved Papa, but not loved him well enough. Now I saw myself as a tiresome and frivolous little girl, and that nauseated me."

"Were you a good nurse?"

"Not very, but I tried hard. We Spanish are a practical people. We set about even expiation sensibly."

"Your brothers must have been delighted, weren't they?"

"They were furious. They were like a couple of watch-dogs driven frantic because they can't get through a fence to bite the postman. But they couldn't do anything. To be a nurse, you must sign on for at least a year, and there's no way of breaking the contract. I was engaged to the son of . . . well, of a quite unjustifiably prominent Andalusian family, at the time. He jilted me rapidly. It was my first experience of that kind."

Nurses, in Spain, are dressed entirely in white. It is said that a nurse requires more than five pounds weight of starch a year in order to maintain, in various parts of her uniform, the proper degree of rigidity. Nurses, in Spain, even wear white shoes and stockings. They are not normally recruited from among young ladies of the affluent and pensionable classes.

"Were the other nurses very horrid to you?" he said.

"Yes, at first, very much so. I spent most of my spare time reading. My companions thought this bizarre, and somewhat subversive, particularly since they spent their own leisure moments being tickled by male orderlies in passageways. One night, and it was a very cold night, they locked me in the mortuary."

She made this statement so amiably that, at first, he did not understand what she had said. But then he did understand, and then he looked at her with eyes wide, slightly glazed, and pupils too much inclined to dart for cover in corners.

"No . . .?" he said at last, much shocked. The vindictiveness of woman towards woman had always been accepted by him as a mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon.

"Oh, yes, they did," she said. "They asked me to go and fetch a

pail there. Then they turned the key, and, I suppose, expected me to scream, but I didn't. I suppose they expected, too, that I'd emerge with white hair in the morning, but actually I had some cigarettes in my pocket and spent quite a pleasant night on a vacant slab wrapped up in some spare shrouds. How stupid people are! Of the three dead bodies in the place I'd nursed two, given them injections, told them to drink their milk, and watched them slowly die, as most old men do seem to die, of prostatic trouble. Why should I be afraid of them because they were so cold, with no one to console them any more? There was a woman there too, with her poor baby, who had died after an unsuccessful Cæsarean, and the child ten minutes later. They lay side by side. In horror there is often sweetness. The windows were barred, of course, but there was some light from a street lamp. I talked to the woman and the two old men all night long. I think it must have been during that night that I grew up."

"Were the other nurses sorry, afterwards?"

"Oh, most. They ceased to be jealous and unpleasant too. Isn't that ridiculous? I had done nothing at all extraordinary, but to them it appeared so. It often seems to me unfortunate: people judge one's character in such an arbitrary manner. There must be so many men in the world held back because they've never had an opportunity to excite the admiration of their fellow human beings. Among my other follies, I was very, statistically minded, too, that year. I kept a record of all the people who were mentioned—Spanish people, I mean—favourably, or unfavourably, in the *Vanguardia* newspaper. I didn't care whether they'd been injured by a tram or awarded a decoration. I just wanted to see how many they amounted to . . ."

"And how many were they?" said Thornton, at once curious and quite pleased to be her stooge, speaker of the comic line which would lead on to the final and conclusive joke.

"Much less than one per cent of the population of Barcelona," said Nuria.

They looked at each other for a moment, realised the uselessness of speech, and were therefore, for a moment, silent. At last, "One day," she said, "one day when I had been among the swabs and bandages about ten months, my sister-in-law rang me up. She invited me to a party. My family had employed that form of treachery before, but now I thought that I was probf

against it; and so I went, and in my nurse's uniform, too: though this not from inverted vanity, but because I had no other clothes available."

"And it was there that you met him?" said Thornton.

"Yes, it was there I met him."

"And you knew he was married, with children?"

"Yes, of course. I always knew the first three lines about everybody."

"You are a remarkable woman."

"At that moment, perhaps, I was one, but only in that moment. There were a lot of people present, and some knew who I was, and some did not. He was one of those who didn't know who I was. He came up to me with a plate of anchovies. 'Why are you a nurse?' he said."

"The Prince must have said something very much like that to Cinderella with reference to the glass slippers," observed Thornton.

"Don't laugh at me, Desmond. I couldn't bear it if you did."

"I'm not laughing. I'm happy to hear this. It makes me want to reach a hand upwards and grasp the tattered bell-ropes of certain old ideals. Oh yes, it does. My language may be unfortunate, but I'm perfectly sincere." He paused. "At this point we skip certain chapters, I think, don't we?" he said.

"Not unless you particularly wish to," she answered coolly.

He looked at her. "I'm sorry," he said, "I won't speak again," and when he said that, she looked at him gravely and replied:

"Desmond, it's been three weeks now . . . don't you care to do as you'd wish to be done by?"

He made no reply to that remark. His mind was a fist clenched in sudden cramp: only the finger-tips were moving, and they moved only to cause pain.

"When we go—and I mean girls like me—at least we go all the way," she said in a flat voice. "I am proud of that. I haven't many things to be proud of, maybe."

"You have much, much reason to be proud," said Thornton.

"He was a diplomat," she said. "Just like my glorious elder brother. I loved him; I gave myself to him, as I believe the expression is. And, as I have already told you, I had not done that before. At first, we kept this secret—he was separated from his wife. She, it seems, collected stamps and, being handicapped by

inverted nipples, could not feed her children properly herself: a small physical impediment which, I understand, is often of considerable conversational interest to ladies of the husband's family. Those were the only facts I ever learnt about that woman, though I suppose she had her tapestry of suffering, too. I certainly had mine."

Thornton said nothing. He did not wish to say anything at this stage.

"Later," she said, "we became much less discreet; then, finally, not discreet at all. That was very silly of us, but I didn't care, and I persuaded him not to care either. When you love a man, those things don't matter: or, at least, to me they didn't. We danced the whole dance card together one night, at the Argentinian Consulate in Barcelona. I believe he loved me. I mean, that he couldn't face the next two years without me. He must have loved me, because he must have known, much better than I did, how it would finish."

"I expect he did, you know," said Thornton. "Don't you think sometimes you may be wrong to blame him?"

"No," said Nuria. "I would like to think that . . . I would like, very much, to think as you do. I am tolerant, too. I know quite well that what is painted to look like steel is often putty; but even putty becomes hard when exposed to the air, I'm told, and so it should not snap when touched, just because it has become too dry."

"Proceed," said Thornton, who now saw that presently he would be obliged to make a general defence of all persons of his sex.

"Ah . . . am I holding things up? Am I keeping something back?"

"You are keeping several dozen things back," he replied, equably, "and you're quite right to do so."

She turned on her side, facing him. Her legs were so long. They were inherited, no doubt, from an American great-grandmother, the daughter of a missionary in Manila.

"I don't know how it would have ended—I mean if the affair had run its natural course," she said. "Perhaps in some South American republic, and not one of the biggest of them either." She smiled at him: "I've been told the climate of Buenos Aires is very hard on the complexion . . . worse even than frustration and remorse."

"Could he not have obtained an annulment of his marriage, or whatever it is you Catholics do?"

"In another country it might have been managed, though there were no real grounds. Matrimonial cases go before a council called the *Rota* in Rome . . . at least, most do, but not Spanish ones because our branch of the Church has a *Rota* of its own and the time they take to try a case is usually about seven years."

"What exactly did your brother do?"

"At first, nothing." She paused. "The New Testament is so unsatisfactory. It doesn't tell us when the idea first enters Judas's head, nor how, nor even really why. Shakespeare is just as bad. I can believe in Iago, but I would like to know a little more about his schooldays. This was my favourite brother, incidentally, the one whom I allowed to tweak my pigtails when I was a little girl, the one who gave me extra pocket money secretly. It's perhaps significant that this . . . this man rather resembled my brother, physically, and was also his friend."

"His friend, you say?"

"His friend and flattered colleague. My brother was Third Secretary in Rome at the time. This man—well, let's face it, his name was Gustavo—was a diplomatic courier in our Roman Embassy. That is why I managed to see him so often. Perhaps the continual exits and entrances were the reason why our relationship stayed fresh, never seemed to deteriorate, but to gain force with each new meeting."

"How long . . . how many meetings?"

"Eighteen months . . . and throughout that time, although he knew about it from the beginning, my brother was perfectly charming to us. He was so much a man of the world, in fact, that I had sometimes to remember to feel ashamed of myself. My mother knew nothing, of course, but almost everybody else did. My brother pacified my various uncles; calmed the outraged feelings of my ex-fiancés—why they should feel outraged, I don't know, but they did—and, by his behaviour generally, persuaded many people that it was all an odious slander."

"All this, I suppose, the better to strike when the time came?"

"Exactly. Italy did my brother no good, no good at all. I've often noticed that Italy does have that effect on Spaniards. We can be subtle, too, but we're seldom dishonestly so. The Italians are charming but they don't fight openly . . . why should they

when they are so subtle? I read once that Italy is the only country where men use poison to murder, more than women do!"

"What happened?" he said impatiently. "What happened?"

"I'm coming to it slowly. Are you really interested? . . . I'd never have thought so." She took a cigarette from the hot sand, and lit it. "He had a month's leave of absence," she said. "Since Barcelona was obviously impossible we agreed to spend that month together in Madrid. He was to come direct from Rome by train on the courier service. He did come, but not direct, and two days late."

"Why?"

"He had five bags with him at the frontier. I don't know whether you've ever seen one: they're not bags, really, but sacks, with a seal, and a lock. They're striped in the national colours, too; just to make it all so much more patriotic. In our foreign service the courier himself seals the bags before he starts his trip. You can see how neat that makes it?"

He took her hand. "What did they discover in the sacks?" he said.

"In four of them, nothing . . . in the fifth and last, and it was the last, which shows you how well the whole affair was managed, they found a large quantity of heroin beneath a folder containing the text of a proposed commercial treaty." She threw away her cigarette. By the softly lapping sea, it smouldered. "You can perhaps guess who was on the station platform in delighted, smirking charge of these operations?"

"Not Aranjuez?" he said.

"But of course. Don't you know by this time that he never missed a party yet?"

"What did they do to him?"

"To begin with, they merely suspended him. That was clever of them. They wanted him to reach Madrid and show himself to me as he really was . . . and I, myself, to him as a selfish, hateful monomaniac in adversity."

Thornton raised her clenched hand, and laid it firm and close against his chest. "Don't go on if you don't want to," he said.

"Oh, I've nearly finished," she replied, "and besides, at this distance of time, I've learnt not only to talk but also to think about it all telegraphically, in flat terms, without apparent emotion."

“He went away?”

She took another cigarette from the packet, held it for a moment, then flung it, unlit, to fall upon the sand within a foot of its forerunner. “Yes, he went away,” she said. “They gave him the alternative of prosecution, which would have meant ten years inside a gaol, or of immediate emigration . . . curiously enough, to South America. He decided on the second course.”

“D’you mean to say that he left you . . . just like that . . . alone in Madrid?”

“Why not? I’m sure your indignation does you credit, but are you certain that you wouldn’t behave in the same way, in the same circumstances? Yes, he went. He went away. He left me; and his wife and children, happily reconciled to an erring husband and a neglectful father, joined him later in Valparaiso, a pleasant town, which some people call the little Paris of the Southern Hemisphere.” She took her hand away from Thornton’s chest, and hit her own chest with it with a blow which must have hurt because the fist was clenched. “I had become odious to him, don’t you see; as the cause of his misfortune. He had no hatred for my brother, none at all . . . only hatred for me.”

Thornton was silent.

She watched him.

“You’ve failed to ask your usual, timely question.”

“I don’t want to ask it.”

“I didn’t want very much, myself, to take the gardenal,” she said. “It tasted so unpleasant and, besides, I was a little young to die. I don’t recommend the experience, by the way. If that is death I’d rather have a death that didn’t make your head whirl round and round, and one which leaves you less time to think before the world goes black. A bullet must be best.”

“How was it that you didn’t die?”

“A friend called to see me at the hotel. There was no answer from my bedroom. There was some consultation with the management, a deliciously general sense of panic among chambermaids who had seen me crying in the passage when he went away that morning: then they broke in, and I woke up in hospital.”

“And your brother?”

“When I was well, he came to fetch me. I always thought he wore braces, but it seemed it wasn’t so. As soon as we were alone he took off his belt. No doubt he meant to beat me with it, but if

so, he'd reckoned without his trousers, in which a too generous margin had been provided for his expanding stomach. I told him that if he touched me I'd kill him. I meant it, too. He didn't touch me. We drove back to Barcelona together. It takes thirteen hours from Madrid. We spoke once, and once only, when, finding he had no change, he asked me to pay a man at a petrol station, outside Zaragoza. I'm sorry to say, though, that I have spoken to him since . . . and many times."

Both were silent for a moment.

"So this is why you work for Aranjuez?" said Thornton at last.

"Yes, that is why I work for Aranjuez."

"But was the dope addressed to you, or something?"

"Does it matter . . . does it matter how the fly falls in the web?"

He looked at her, and touched her cheek, and, as he did this, her shoulders heaved, and the tears came at last . . . at last. When a man is very miserable he will sometimes ask himself whether the state of mind of a madman can be so very different from that of a person who is, judicially, sane. When a man is very miserable he will experience, for quite long periods at a time, a sensation of utter emptiness, and simultaneously a feeling of heaviness, as if he were a little behind the general march of events, and as if he were too slow, too clumsy, to be able to unravel their meaning.

In a story which is entitled *The Shadow*, Hans Andersen describes how a certain philosopher, "born in the cold regions of the north," and travelling in warmer countries, lost his shadow while dreaming, with a philosophical intensity, of a young woman whom he had seen standing by an open window.

But in warm climates plants grow quickly, sprout, and flower—and also fade—and before a week had passed the philosopher saw, to his great joy, that a new shadow had sprung from beneath his feet, and was already growing, and growing ever bigger, each time that he took a short walk in the sun.

"I think that I can smoke a cigarette now without throwing it away," said Nuria presently.

And it was as he lit that cigarette for her that Thornton saw the boat, close inshore, and Barry's figure waving.

Where, in God's name, had the man obtained a megaphone?

"Can you hear me, Desmond . . . well, double off round the

other side of the bloody island and meet me . . . I've only got a day to spare, but I've quite a lot of news for you . . ."

Fourteen

THE COUNTRY NORTH OF APT, in the Vaucluse department of France, is very wild. The roads are rare and ill-maintained. Houses are seldom seen. At night the headlights of a car pick out no more vegetation than a thorny thicket, a clump of umbrella pines and, here and there, a lonely elm, a puzzled goat.

The time was now three o'clock. Barry, who was sitting in front, glanced over his shoulder at the three persons in the back seat. They were silent now. God knows, they had made enough din an hour ago, thought Barry, as he observed them with distaste. He had always known that something would go wrong with this job, because he had been unable to supervise any but his own part in it. Sure enough it had begun with a lovely balls-up, and wasn't finished yet.

Mariano had brought the car down from Paris. In the afternoon they had set the agreed signal, a white shirt, on the hillside. A few minutes later had come the affirmative wave of a handkerchief from a window on the first floor of the house. So far, so good. The pair dined in Forcalquier, then motored back. They left the car in a pine-wood about a quarter of a mile down the road. By one o'clock they were in position beside the medlar tree. Mariano climbed the tree. He lowered the ladder gently on the other side of the wall. A half paralysed nun could have come over that wall now in peace and quiet. But no: it was not to be.

At five minutes past two they heard whispers, followed by a wheezing noise as of a fat man engaged upon unaccustomed exertions. It was Moulay Hassan himself, perched for a moment like a great white toad upon the wall, then dropping with agility into Mariano's arms.

"Well done," said Barry. "Who's next?"

The old man set his spectacles to rights. He seemed calm, even impressively so. He shook Barry's hand. "It is the woman now," he said.

But it was not, however, the woman who came next: it was the cursed, bastard secretary. They heard a muttered altercation, then the man's head appeared above the wall. He must have been thirty years younger than his master but nobody would have thought so, watching him. The man clung there on the wall making a noise like an old woman who had gone hard on the whisky at an Irish wake.

"Jump," said Barry.

The man would not jump. He slithered down the cedar tree, then crouched in the ditch with his bleeding hands pressed against his tunic. A presentiment of disaster pulsed through Barry.

"Shin up that tree and help the girl over," he said to Mariano.

Afterwards he wished he had been less chivalrous. The girl was evidently a good girl, and determined to execute the business in hand with prompt and valorous despatch. She came over the wall with the grace of a hurdler, and was about to drop when she found herself confronted, at two-foot range, with Mariano's monkey features: an alarming sight in any circumstances, but particularly so in these.

She uttered a great cry, more plangent than the virtuous Lucretia's single scream, then fell, to be caught clumsily by Barry.

"That's done it," thought Barry. He told the lot of them to run. The three fugitives required no such encouragement: they covered twenty yards in their several directions, before he spoke. Barry ordered Mariano to round them up and escort them to the car. Himself lingered behind. It was essential to discover the reactions, if any, of the sentry, and guard-room.

These reactions were immediate. They were as audible as the woman's scream, and quite as catastrophic. The sentry, no doubt obeying some item of his standing orders, fired a warning shot. Two seconds later, the very characteristic lowing of non-commissioned officers roused by the call of duty from a vinous sleep could be plainly heard. The entire guard was turning out. Barry turned and ran, disliking himself intensely because he had failed to take the elementary precaution of ascertaining whether and, if so, what form of transport his opponents possessed.

When he reached the car the three Arabs were already huddled in the back seat. The engine was running. Barry had never felt more grateful to Mariano, but he said so only by the run of splayed fingers through his friend's hair.

"Drive," he said.

"I *am* driving," said Mariano. "The point is, which way would you like to go? Maybe you've never seen a road block, but I've seen one or two, and this glass doesn't happen to be bullet-proof."

"The essential, for the moment, is to cover ground . . . kilometres of it," replied Barry equably. "They don't know where we're going: it's only when the big man comes on the job about eight o'clock to-morrow morning that the startling fact that we must be making for the coast will penetrate those occlusive skulls. Even then, half an hour will be lost, because the big man will be preparing his defence: I mean being disagreeable to subordinates whom he'll charge with negligence if the ball bounces the wrong way for him. The nearest thing to eternal safety is to involve a French *préfet* in your activities." He produced his map, folded, protected by cellophane. "Go straight south to Apt," he said. "After that, we'll see."

"They'll have telephoned all round the department by now."

"Well, what if they have? Use your imagination, *chiquillo*. Gendarmes don't want to get killed any more than anyone else, and above all when they've just left their wife's warmth, and put on, in the February cold, their government-issue combinations. When you see a couple of them on the road ahead, don't forget that very few men die for their country, and none at all for anything as abstract as Justice . . . and that if they have carbines, we have . . ."

He was interrupted at this moment by the sound of a motor-cycle, behind. Only much later did he learn that the garrison also possessed a jeep, which, fortunately, was not at that moment mobile because of magneto trouble.

"So there you are," said Mariano as if he were serving a rare dish. Like many Spaniards he was indifferent to his personal fate, but strongly interested in the crack of doom as it affected others. He did not care if he died: so long as he died in the right.

"Put your foot down on the pedal," said Barry. "I'll deal with him." He drew his gun. "Get down behind the seat," he said to his passengers. They dived immediately. He stared through the back window of the car. The road was a night-washed grey: the motor-cyclist, hunched like a bee on a daisy, was gaining on them.

"Don't kill him," said Mariano. "Wing him if you like, but don't kill him."

"I don't propose to kill him," said Barry. "Shall I show you why?" He raised his pistol. The three Arabs bent their heads to smell granulated rubber on the floor. Barry fired. The shot burst through the back window and kicked up a slash of gravel fifty yards behind the blue and coruscated twirl of their exhaust. The motor-cycle wobbled, then came on. Barry drew his breath in admiration.

"Give him one in the leg since he wants it so much," said Mariano. "He's trying to come past us, then hold us up . . . the classic line."

"Why don't you edge him into the ditch as he draws level?" said Barry.

"No," said Mariano. "I have the wheel. You have the gun. You do what you please."

Barry did as he pleased. The motor-cyclist came past them, slowed, and at this moment, Barry fired again. He saw the spurt of dust and air as the bullet hit the back tyre of the motor-cycle, the rider's anguished face as he struggled to regain control of his machine. Then they were alone upon the road.

A few minutes later they were approaching the large town of Cadenet.

"I don't fancy this," said Mariano. "Is there no road round this place?"

"Not on my map," said Barry. "I'm afraid we'll have to chance it."

"And if we're seen?"

Barry shrugged his shoulders.

Fortunately, Cadenet seemed to be asleep. No figure stirred, no voice was raised, as they swept through the streets.

"You see . . ." said Barry.

He spoke too soon. Two miles beyond the town there lies a bridge across the River Durance. At the far end of the bridge they saw torches flashing. Two figures, apparently resolute, barred their passage.

"Don't worry," said Barry. "They'll jump aside at the last moment."

Mariano pressed his foot on the accelerator. The two gendarmes sprang clear; then they turned and fired. These men were using

mitraillettes. The passengers were once again recumbent on the floor. The woman was wailing softly.

"This is getting too hot altogether," said Mariano.

"There's a side turning soon," said Barry. "It leads east towards Pourcieux."

Presently they came to it.

"Slow down as you turn," said Barry. "You don't want to leave your tyre marks."

"One clue more or less won't make much difference," said the Spaniard. "It's like a paper chase already."

The side road was metalled but tortuous. Mariano shut off his headlights. They climbed by the wan light of the moon. A further half hour, and then Barry told him to stop.

"Why?"

"They'll have to change their clothes sometime. This is as good a spot as any."

"In that case I'll change the number plates, too. Every little helps."

Barry disembarked. He extracted a large brown paper package from the boot and broke the string. Clothes spilled in all directions. "Well now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have the honour to present to you my spring collection, straight from the clothes-hangers of the *Galerie Lafayette*. The colours are conservative, the cloth hard-wearing, and the ties discreet. For the lady, I understand my friend has even bought a handbag and a hat." He thrust trousers, waistcoats, shoes, upon the two men.

"But we cannot change here, in the open," protested the secretary.

"Brushes are available at a short distance," said Barry, pointing. He watched them walk away. "What's the matter, dear?" he said to the woman who lingered. "Don't you like it?"

"There is nothing to hold up these stockings," she replied disdainfully.

"Well, never mind. We'll find something for you presently." He grinned as she made off in her turn. "I do think you might have bought the poor woman a suspender belt," he said to Mariano, who was busy with a screwdriver on the number plate.

"You wouldn't say that if you'd seen the faces of the women in the shop when I asked for underclothes." Mariano put the

screwdriver away. He looked down at his handiwork with satisfaction. "We are now Belgian tourists." He pointed to the red, painted letters.

"That goes so beautifully with the French licence on the wind-screen, doesn't it?"

"I am about to change that," replied Mariano, with dignity, and he did so. The task accomplished, he blew his nose, then lit a cigarette. "How far is it to the coast?" he said.

"About ninety kilometres."

"Well, I don't think we'll manage it. The car is too conspicuous. The number plates won't save us if we're stopped. They must have been warned by now to look out for a Hotchkiss. I was a fool to use one."

"That's what I think, too," said Barry.

From one of the flap pockets in the front seats Mariano produced a *tortilla* sandwich. He threw away his cigarette and munched.

Although Barry had been constantly in this man's company for many weeks now, he had never seen or heard him order one of these *tortillas*: yet one always seemed to be available for consumption in the moment of relaxation.

"Don't you ever worry about liver trouble; eating so many eggs?" he said.

Mariano munched. "What's your plan?" he said, through shreds of bread.

"There's a railway at a place called Trets," said Barry. "There are also taxis, and men who'll do a lot for twenty thousand francs. We'll hide the car somewhere outside and then split up."

"The first charcoal-burner who comes along will find it."

"Maybe he will . . . but then it's just a Belgian car, belonging to campers who've gone off to buy provisions. The boat comes in for us to-morrow night, and it'll be to-morrow night before they've got round to thinking that the car may be ours. You must plunge into the official mind, with its faculties preserved in brine. They're looking for five people: three of whom are *Sidis*. The south of France is full of Arabs in European clothes. The girl is the only difficulty, really . . . and even she could pass as one of Marseille's many accidents of nature."

"So how do we split up?"

"You take the girl and the secretary. I take the old man. You

have a map. We meet to-morrow evening in that wood above Bédoule."

"I don't want to take the girl," said Mariano.

"My dear fellow," said Barry, "I always did think that it was a great risk that you appeared to have no private life of a recreational character, and now—when the moment is exquisitely inopportune—we see the sad results of that ascetic policy." He paused. "You'll kindly leave the copulating girl alone," he added.

"There are not many opportunities for that class of athletics in a train." Mariano spoke peaceably.

"Finish your sandwich," said Barry. "I don't want to quarrel with you."

The two men returned, metamorphosed in their reach-me-downs, dark physical realities encased within tweed cylinders. The secretary, in a chocolate pin-stripe, appeared particularly implausible; but Moulay Hassan, even in this fair-ground garb, retained his dignity, and to it he had added, most felicitously, a sprig of white heather in his lapel.

"I trust you are not too uncomfortable, gentlemen?" said Barry.

"I have dressed in this way before for private theatricals," replied Moulay. "I am afraid, though, that you have overestimated both the length and width of my feet. Listen, please . . ." He squeaked in serious pace upon the tarmac.

"I'll give you a sheet of newspaper," said Barry. "Where did you leave your other clothes. In the bushes? That won't do. I'll have to bury them." He took a spade from the boot and made off in quest of the crumpled garb of Araby.

When he returned—richer by the knowledge of what refined Berber ladies wore beneath their outer clothing—he found the three men clustered in an admiring half-moon around the woman.

"The fashion show will have to wait," he said. "Please get in, everybody. We're in a hurry."

And, as they drove again through the damp, surprised and misty night, he explained his plan to Moulay Hassan; and was astonished at the latter's unconcern, amounting almost to indifference.

"You realise," he said at last, when private exasperation had reached combustion point, "that this is not going to be easy?"

"We have realised this from the first moment," replied Moulay.

"Perhaps we realised it before you did yourself." He touched, with a charming gesture of deprecation, the throat of his secretary; lightly with his forefinger: the secretary recoiled, but did not cease to tremble. "There are men," continued Moulay, quite gently, "there are men, like this man, who have lived at the point of a knife too long. Other men, who know the use of scabbards, and of the less customary places of concealment in their clothing, are less nervous of merely human possibilities. Few have the blood of the Prophet. Of those few, fewer still possess his single-mindedness."

Barry made no reply. He took a packet of English cigarettes from his pocket. He flashed his lighter, then watched the chins of the two Arabs, as they drew their careful, mouth-deep puffs. The car sped past rocks and trees which none present would ever see again, in all probability. The treaded tyres sucked at the road

* * * *

"*Chouf . . . chouf . . . chouf.*"

The train chugged onwards, stopping at intervals of a few minutes at small stations to unload newspapers and to take aboard a throng of noisy peasants. Everybody seemed to know everybody else, nor was the exchange of gossip and information impeded by the absence of corridors. A man who wished to speak to another merely stuck his head out of the window and shouted. The shout was repeated by persons of good-will until contact had been achieved. Fragments from a score of conversations reached Barry and at one point, leaning out, he was asked to pass a basket containing a hen from one compartment to another.

He turned to Moulay. "We were lucky to get a carriage to ourselves," he said.

"Yes," replied the old man. He placed no particular emphasis upon the words. He accepted this situation as he had accepted the history of the previous eight hours, including a walk of five miles across rough country to the station. It was difficult for Barry, looking at him, to realise that this man had been regarded by his late captors as a dangerous agitator. He suggested rather some anchorite compelled by urgent family business, a funeral or a legacy, to make a journey to the city; a hermit who made use of the tangible advantages of civilisation much as might a child make use of an attractive toy belonging to another: with amusement,

but also with an inner reticence. He seemed, indeed, less to deplore than to dissociate himself entirely from the turn, occasionally humiliating, always dangerous, which events had taken, and it was thus with the more surprise that Barry heard the remark which he made now:

“It is a pity about the car.”

“The car?”

“Yes, it was a good car. I had one of that make once. It was fitted with a folding table on which coffee could be served. The seats were of real pigskin. There was some discussion about that, but I stopped it. I cannot see how one can be contaminated by the pig in the form of upholstery, but of course some of my compatriots chose to take a more narrow view.” Moulay paused. He was fond of milk chocolate, and had asked Barry to buy him a packet in the station buffet at Trets. He broke off a piece now, and placed it in his mouth. “I suppose the origin of the car will be traced when it is found?”, he said. “Various parts of the engine are numbered, are they not?”

“It is of no importance,” said Barry. “I didn’t ask Mariano, but I think you may take it that the car was stolen.”

“What curious things one is obliged to do in order to preserve one’s honour,” said Moulay. He smiled; his teeth were flecked with chocolate: “And the other three . . . will they be all right?” he said.

“There is no reason why they should not be. All they have to do is to buy their tickets on a bus. You have seen for yourself that since we split up we excite no suspicion. As I said, it always takes a little time for the official mind to appreciate the obvious.”

“Then why do you appear so ill at ease?”

“Do I appear ill at ease?”

“Yes, you seem unable to sit quietly. You have also spoken to yourself several times . . . in English, I suppose. My debt towards you is mounting with every minute which passes. If you have some worry of a personal nature, I should be very glad to help you.”

“My worry is not personal,” said Barry. “I have allowed myself to become involved in the misfortunes of others, and now regret it. That is all.”

“You are perhaps meditating some action which you will later regret even more keenly?” said Moulay.

"No, I don't think so. I am meditating nothing. I am irritated because I don't care to be faced with problems concerning human values. I dislike problems concerning human values."

"What you desire to say, perhaps," said Moulay, "is that while you consider it unthinkable to abandon your friend, it is so obviously the best and most logical solution."

"I don't understand what you mean," said Barry.

"It has always seemed to me that Señor Aranjuez, whom I hope to meet shortly, was of an admirable but somewhat innocent character," said Moulay Hassan. "I should have thought that he would have realised that you were not the only person who could climb a wall, nor the only person who could bring me a message from the outside world?"

"If you were so closely in touch with the outer world," said Barry, "why did you not escape before, and by other means?"

"Because yours chanced to suit me best, of course."

"Are you telling me you have an informer in Aranjuez's office?"

"My informant is perhaps Señor Aranjuez himself," said Moulay.

"Ah? And what have you learnt?"

"Many things. A few about yourself, a few others about a person connected with you. It costs nothing, you see, to give me such information, which can be of no service to me, but inspires a touching confidence . . . can you not see me saying even now: 'He is a remarkable man, this Señor Aranjuez; not only does he rescue me but also tells me something of his plans, of his hopes, of the difficulties which he is facing so bravely on my behalf.'"

"No, I'm afraid I cannot see you saying that at all."

"You cannot? Well, perhaps you are right. It is so difficult to know the honourable course of action with you Europeans." Moulay sighed. He selected another square of chocolate.

"You seem to be following a carefully planned course of action at this moment," said Barry. And he was not referring to the chocolate.

"Ah . . . is that the impression I give?"

"Yes."

"One must learn to look at these matters objectively," said Moulay, "so many French people, powerful people, will be angry when they find I have escaped. Señor Aranjuez may wish to placate these people, to offer them a sop, as it were, to their

wounded pride. After all, although obliged to go against their wishes in this matter, no doubt the time will come when he may want to work with them again?"

"Yes, I dare say it will."

"I do not know, of course, what this friend you have aboard your boat has done, nor why he has annoyed the French police, but I was wondering whether you would not consider it wiser to leave him ashore to-night?"

"Really? And how could I do that?"

"I know so little of nautical matters, but I understand that when a rowing-boat leaves a beach hurriedly it is sometimes difficult to rejoin it?"

"And did Aranjuez put that suggestion in the memorandum he was kind enough to send you?"

"Señor Aranjuez is too prudent a man to commit his thoughts to paper."

"Yes, very likely, but if I left my friend ashore he would be quite justifiably angry. He would also make his way back to Spain."

"Is it not you who is now being innocent?" said Moulay. "Does it not occur to you that there might be some people near at hand who would be glad to have a talk with your friend?"

"In that case, wouldn't they also like a talk with you, and with me?"

"There are many kinds of people. Some are interested in one thing, some in another. You have lived so long in Tangiers that perhaps you have forgotten that France is a democratic republic?"

"I have heard the phrase employed."

"Then perhaps you will permit me to define it? A democratic republic is a state where men have two hands, as elsewhere. One of these hands is placed firmly on its owner's pocket-book: the other is attempting to obtain possession of somebody else's. Although it is scarcely to the advantage of France that I should be at liberty, there are men in that country who will be glad to hear of my escape because it will enable them to attack and discredit other men."

"You take a rather sombre view of human nature, don't you?"

"I take a view which has been forced upon me. We have a proverb in my language with which you may be acquainted? It says

that he who bites at every weed must light at last on poison."

"And we have another in mine," said Barry, "which says that friends are like fiddle-strings and must not be screwed too tight. Let me add that I intend that quotation for you: not for anybody else."

"Your loyalty to your own friend is admirable," said Moulay.

"I am glad you think so. In this case it also happens to be superfluous."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I do not believe that there will be any party of gentlemen waiting for my friend to-night."

"Can you be so sure of that?"

"Yes, I can be quite sure. When you meet Señor Aranjuez you'll realise that his mind is indeed a complicated mechanism, and that, like kittens, he is fond of little games, and specially of little games which serve as warnings. Since we are talking of proverbs, perhaps you remember the one about crying 'Wolf'? Now, the peculiar thing about Aranjuez is that he cries 'Wolf' from purely altruistic motives: he wants to let you know that the wolf will really come one day and he would think it most ungentlemanly to take you at a disadvantage; and the nicest way of telling you that, of course, is to show you circumstances in which the wolf *might* have come. I'm sure that he had a great deal of amusement dictating that little memorandum for you. It might interest you to know, incidentally, that my friend's misdemeanours are not political and that his capture could not benefit you in any way whatever."

"I did not suggest that it would do so," replied Moulay Hassan equably. "What's more, I have already said that there was no suggestion made to me in that memorandum. In fact, this subject was only one of many touched upon."

"But touched upon by finger-tips of talent, don't you agree?" said Barry. "Personally, I'm very grateful to him for the small reminder . . . I was tending to take a too narrow view of certain circumstances. D'you mind?" He did not wait for an answer, but thereupon closed the window. They had reached a new station. Many people were descending, many more than had descended were mounting. Here, in this small market town, to-day was market day, but a clock obscured Barry's view, and so he would never know where market day had taken place that day. Two

priests entered the carriage, made enquiries concerning the two vacant corner seats, then sat down, and opened breviaries. One of the priests was old and, to judge by his appearance, dispirited; but the other was young. The *soutane* of this one was neat, his chin almost beardless. Barry's attention was distracted, during some moments, by the repeatedly emphasised thumps on the wall. He opened the window again and helped to pass the hen back to her proprietor. "We must hope that she has been successfully fertilised," he said when he sat down.

Moulay had been watching the priests intently. Now he turned to Barry and let go in Goncourt French. "I did not know there was a cock next door," he said. "I did not hear it call."

"Cocks seldom call at such moments," said Barry.

"It smells of black in here," said Moulay. "Would you mind opening the window?" He did so. No one stood in his path.

"Shall we continue?" said Barry.

"If you wish."

The two priests looked at them with the sidelong glance of women who are listening to gossip about themselves.

"The gentleman we were discussing," said Barry, "also told me to tell *you* something. He told me to tell it you at the first favourable opportunity. Isn't that nice?"

"Oh yes, did he?"

"He is really a clever man," said Barry. "Of course, like most clever men he wastes most of his intelligence upon effects." He glanced at the priests. "It wouldn't surprise me to know he was psychic; that he knows exactly what we're saying to each other at this very moment."

"Oh yes . . . would you say that?" said Moulay Hassan amiably, and he, in his turn, watched the murmurs of the clergy.

"Yes, I would say it, indeed I would," said Barry. "I would say it because he asked me to tell you something, too . . . when we were settled of course. He asked me most particularly to do so."

"And what was that?"

"He asked me to inform you that we are not going where you think we are going, right away, because we have to pick up another person first."

"What person, and where?" said Moulay.

● Barry hesitated. He glanced at the priests; then he leant

forward. "I shall tell you in what is known as a conspiratorial whisper," he said. "D'you mind?"

"Whether I mind or not is my own affair," said Moulay. "What did he say?"

"He said we must go first to an island called Galite, to pick up somebody else."

The effect of this statement upon Moulay Hassan was even more remarkable than Barry had predicted. The man's face assumed, immediately, the green tinge of envy. That was the general colour of his face, but sallow patches, more grey than green in hue, upon his cheek-bones proclaimed that malice must very soon sweep all less powerful emotions before it.

"There are many men on Galite," he said. "It is a well known place of exile. Most of these men are Tunisians."

"Not this one," said Barry, watching him.

"I refuse to be the rescuer of that man," said Moulay. "He is my most bitter enemy."

"You seem to me very sectarian," said Barry. "I should have thought you would have been glad to help an intransigent fighter for your cause."

"That man is not a fighter for my cause."

"You are depriving me of one of my last illusions," said Barry. He contrived to appear downcast. "I knew that Presbyterians cannot get on with Catholics, although they both pretend to worship Christ, but I thought all Moslems were Moslems."

"I refuse to accompany you any farther."

"Very well," said Barry. "In that case, at the next station I will leave this train. You will be able to look after yourself, I take it?"

Moulay Hassan made no intelligible reply. He snorted. His face was now mostly grey: the green was going.

"I am glad to see you more amenable," said Barry. "I told you Aranjuez would laugh. Perhaps you now believe me? That is his way, you see . . . a point for you, and then a point for me. I don't wonder that he finds life dull. D'you know, it wouldn't surprise me to hear he knew that these two charming priests would be in the carriage at this moment? But the last trick will be mine, of course. These clever people always overreach themselves."

Moulay Hassan folded the silver paper round the little that remained of his chocolate. He placed the package in his pocket.

The train ran on. The day was increasing, hourly, in a sticky leaf and springtime glory. Moulay Hassan looked at the priests.

"Such a long struggle," he said. "And to what purpose?" He looked at the priests again, then said, in a muted voice: "Do they wither, do you think, when they are not employed?"

"For that we'd have to lift the *soutane*, wouldn't we?" said Barry.

He looked carefully at Moulay. "I'm glad to see you are yourself again," he said. *

"It seems so sad," said Moulay. "One feels that they must wither."

* * * *

Barry always thought about things when he wished to think about them, not before. This is an emotional advantage enjoyed by relatively few persons.

It was while he was with Moulay in the second train, during the afternoon, that Barry decided to think about the three days which he had spent in Barcelona and, more particularly, to think about the final night.

Moulay was asleep, the carriage empty save for their two selves and a solitary meat fly which had obtained admittance at some station farther up the line. The life of a fly must be a curious one, reflected Barry; a life much influenced by chance and hazard. Bored by describing endless circles in the sun, the fly flew through a window in search of shade and coolness, but the window proved to be that of a motor-car, and before the fly obtained release he had been transported fifty miles, far away from other flies with whom he may well have been on terms of friendship. There were other perils, too: those human foreheads, for example, covered with a delicious swamp of salty perspiration. Upon some foreheads it was perfectly safe to alight, even to linger, because the fly could sense that the retributory hand would arrive a split second too late. Yet the fly could never be *quite* sure, could never know for certain which hands were agile, and which others must at last inflict upon him a swift and ghastly death. And it was the same with sticky things: some were pies and cakes and tarts, delectable pasture for interminable meals, but other surfaces, quite as attractive viewed from above, could prove a morass of marmalade, purveyor of a death by suffocation.

Barry opened the window. He released the fly, which had been buzzing angrily, anxious to escape. The train was passing through flat country planted with vineyards and with peach trees, these latter now in blossom. There would be no more stations until the terminus at Aubagne, twenty kilometres distant. It was the window which reminded Barry of Barcelona. There had been a window in Barcelona, too, with a view of peach trees in blossom, in a garden just across the road. And the moon had shone on the peach trees as he dressed, and had provided him with just sufficient light with which to find his shoes and tie. . . .

And it had been while he was putting on his second shoe that she had woken up, switched on the bedside lamp, and looked at him.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm dressing."

"But why? What time is it?"

"It's three o'clock."

"You mustn't go away at this time of night. Don't be silly: come back to bed," she beckoned. Her night-dress had slipped. His stubborn beard had left a mark upon her shoulder.

"No, thank you."

"But you can't get out, downstairs, without the key to the street door."

"I've got it. I took it out of your handbag." He showed it. "I'll post it back to you."

"What *do* you mean?" She swung her legs out of bed, and reached for her dressing-gown. Then she confronted him. "You mustn't go," she said. "You mustn't go like this."

"Oh yes . . . and who's to stop me?"

She stared at him then intently, and it must have been the expression on his face which made her utter the long, chastened cry "*Oh . . . ooh*" as if he had struck her, as she was soon to strike him.

"You'd best get back to bed and sleep," he said. "That is, if you *can* sleep. I wouldn't be able to in your circumstances."

"But, Barry . . ."

"Where's my coat? Ah, here . . ." He put it on. "Are you all right for money?" he said. "I could leave a little something on the mantelpiece next door, beside that cup, if you like . . . or perhaps inside the cup might be best."

He turned away. She hit him with her clenched left hand. He felt the trickling caress of blood upon his cheek-bone, and smiled at her.

"Now you've cut me with your wedding ring," he said. "That brings it to a perfect end."

"*Salaud*," she said. "*Salaud*."

"Oh, do you think so? I gave myself two days to do it and it took three. One overestimates one's own powers, but never the perversity of women."

Her eyes, her so fine and so expressive eyes, were hard now, and dry . . . dry. All liquid seemed to have left them, so that they looked like prunes, or buttons, and the face, above, beneath the eyes, was discomposed and flaccid. Yet she spoke quite calmly:

"So it was a trap," she said. "Just a trap. I suppose he sent you, did he?"

"You must know your husband very inadequately to suppose anything of that kind."

She flung herself on the bed, face downwards. Her sobs shook the mattress. He watched her, but he watched without pity. Presently she turned her head so that he could see her tear-stained face.

"Have you forgotten what you said?" she said.

"I'm glad you mention that. Shall we examine what I did say? Did I say that I loved you? . . . I did not. It would hardly have been a very convincing statement to make upon such a short acquaintance. Did I say that you were beautiful, that I found you irresistibly attractive? No, I did not. I said nothing . . . nothing at all."

Dominique stood up. She was smaller barefooted, but she was still valiant. "Then how did this happen?" she said. "I invited you to dinner, and then . . ."

"Yes, you invited me to dinner, and towards the end of it you had your child brought in by the maid. That was a beautiful touch, I thought."

"I was not thinking about it being a beautiful touch, at the time. I just thought that you might like to see her," said Dominique.

"I did like to see her. She is the child of my friend."

"Of your friend . . . you call him your friend?"

"Yes, madam, of my friend . . . my friend. I do call him that."

"You have a curious idea of friendship, haven't you?"

"No, Dominique, I have not a curious idea of friendship at all: I have a loyal and constant one. I was thinking very precisely about my idea of friendship in the train from Madrid. Since you are up and awake, shall we go into the next room?"

"As you wish," she said.

"I think there's still some coffee in the kitchen," he said. "Perhaps you could heat it without disturbing the maid?"

"Very well," she said.

As soon as she had gone, he removed the lid of the cup upon the mantelpiece and he took from the interior several of the white *sachets* which were lying there beneath old envelopes and theatre tickets. When she returned with the tray he held one of these *sachets* out for her to see.

"I suppose you got your little boy-friend to provide it for you, do you?" he said. "I used to deal in this myself. How are prices these days?"

She made no reply. She placed the tray gently upon a table; then she walked over to the window. Her hand clutched, unclutched, then clutched again upon the rough fabric of the curtain. He poured himself some coffee.

"How do you employ it?" he said. "On your neck, with ice . . . or do you sniff it? I've never used it myself, but I've heard that it makes women very passionate. Did you take some this evening?"

She turned and faced him. "Stop it," she said, "for God's sake, stop it!"

"No, I won't stop for a long time yet, I'm afraid. I see you did take some. You must be careful. It's like love: it shows very clearly in the eyes and, like love too, it can have an odd effect upon the heart. I mean it can be fatal."

She made no reply to this. He sat down and crossed his legs and watched her. He stirred his coffee, added sugar, stirred again. "Somebody sent me here," he said. "I wondered why at the time, but one loses so much prestige if one asks stupid questions. Now I know, of course. I suppose the person who sent me knew that I'd discover that by myself." He lifted the *sachet*. "I have so many of the habits of the jackdaw. I love everything that gleams." He opened the *sachet*, tipped it downward: the fine snowlike

crystals cascaded to the floor. He pressed his foot on them, then looked at the white smudge on the carpet. "You want to be careful," he said, "it's lucky your daughter is past the crawling stage. Just one of these is quite enough to kill a child."

She was looking out of the window, at the moon. "How could you?" she said. "How *could* you do this to me?"

He sipped his coffee. "That's a most inapposite remark," he said. "A man about to be executed might make that remark to the hangman, and d'you know what the hangman would reply?"

She looked at him. "Tell me," she said. "You're so clever."

"The hangman," he said, "would answer that he was performing a public duty, hereditary in his family."

She crossed the room. She sat down in the rocking-chair, facing him, and lit a cigarette. "Did you say a public duty?" she said.

"Yes, those were the words I used."

"Then allow me to say that you showed some enthusiasm in performing it."

"D'you think so? Believe me, if you do, you're mistaking a mental for a physical stimulus. It's a not uncommon error."

"I think you're the most hateful man I've ever met," she said. "Now go, please." She pointed to the door.

"Oh no. I've by no means finished with you yet."

"I'll call my maid, and put you out."

"I don't think you will. I don't think you want her to find me here. Don't you remember; you pretended to say good-bye to me more than two hours ago? But of course you pretend so many things that perhaps you have forgotten?"

"I've forgotten nothing . . . nothing."

He crossed the room and stood close beside her. "I knew you were rotten two years ago when you played him that trick in France," he said. "I'm sorry now that I didn't meet you then. I'd have dealt with you. By God, I would have."

"Would you? And by these same means?"

"No, I'll give you the credit of thinking that they wouldn't have been successful then."

Dominique lit another cigarette. "Cold-bloodedly," she said. "Cold-bloodedly. You're not a man; you're a monster. Let me remind you of one or two things you seem to have forgotten. You took me out last night, and after dinner you hired a boat and a boatman to take us round the port . . ."

"I did, and the water was greasy."

"The boatman was familiar. He made several remarks which annoyed me, but you made no reply at all. What did you do exactly . . . shall I tell you? You put your hand on my arm, and you laughed at the offensive things which he said."

"If you wish to play Tit, I will always play Tat," said Barry. "Do you remember that, long before the boat, while we were having dinner, you excused yourself? I followed you. I am very good at that; I was eating an anchovy in the most natural manner imaginable when you returned, but in the meantime I had heard you telephoning to reassure young Llavaneras. What was it exactly you said to him? . . . a sick headache, I believe, and not to call. Am I right? Those old-fashioned excuses are always best, aren't they?" He looked at her calmly. "You bitch," he said.

"You call me a bitch, but what are you? You have been a fine friend to Desmond, haven't you?" She turned, jerking her thumb at the balcony, the peach trees, the yoghurt moon: "It was there that you kissed me . . . yes, there by that cactus . . . if I had some chalk I'd make a cross to mark the spot. Didn't I say that it wasn't right . . . didn't I say that?"

"Oh yes, you did, indeed," he said. "Quite loudly, too, but perhaps that was because you thought Pepita might be listening. It's the privilege of every *chica*, every servant girl, and of course it makes the wrong done infinitely sweeter to a jaded taste like yours."

"Why do you hate me so much?" she said. "I never did you any harm. I don't think I ever did anyone any harm. I never meant to, anyway."

"Then I should advise you to take a look at that poor bastard, your husband. Not a very sympathetic man, some people say; I really can't imagine why. I saw him only four days ago. My boat was leaving. There was very little time to spare, but I could see him sculling like hell across the bay, in the dinghy, with the woman weighting down the stern so that he caught a crab at every second stroke."

"You would have to mention that woman, of course."

"And why not? That woman is a good woman."

"You mean a careful one, don't you?"

"I mean just what I say from various times to various times, and at present I mean this, and because it is so ridiculous, I mean

it about double: he was sculling like a galley-slave because he wanted to give me a white mouse for treatment on the mainland. One of the mouse's rear feet had been bitten off by one of his cats."

The coffee was now cold, but Dominique poured herself a cup, forgot to add sugar, and winced as she drank. "He has always liked cats," she said. "When I was young, I liked cats, too . . . I liked all animals, then, except pigs. But I ceased entirely to like cats when he told me that the one we had—the one which I could see sitting on a table or on the best chair—had also sat in a melancholy way upon Gloria's coffin. Surely it must be a stupid thing to say such a thing to any subsequent woman? He was desperately fond of that cat. She had been with him since his time at the Consulate in Nantes. She climbed down or fell from a tree, and was captured, killed and eaten, by *gitanos*. That is what he thinks, but in point of fact I got up that night. I was on the kitchen balcony. The cat was on the tree. I shook the tree: the cat fell—in mid-air she looked at me, I well remember—the cat fell, was hurt, and crawled away. The rest is the official story."

"Did you know that I had known Gloria?" he said.

"Of course I knew that you had known Gloria: what do you imagine?"

"I think that's why . . . I think that's really why you kissed me," he said.

"Yes," she said. "Perhaps it is, perhaps you're right. You were her little boy, weren't you . . . a cross between a coolie and a caddy."

He bent down. He took hold of the cold, brass tray. He placed the tray upon a sideboard, beside a pink china goat. "Ladies like you have always something to drink. Please give me a brandy and soda," he said. He took a book from the shelf. It was the *Sous le Soleil de Satan*, of Bernanos. There was Thornton's name upon the flyleaf.

She gave him his brandy.

"We're more friendly now, I see," he said.

"It's not my fault," she said, "if you appoint yourself Desmond's glorious defender. Incidentally, if I'm sure of one thing it's that he wouldn't like it."

He put down his brandy untouched. "He wouldn't like it—he wouldn't like it!" he said. "Oh, that's lovely. Shall I tell you

where he is now? . . . no, no, I don't mean on the boat; I mean this." He stuck out a thumb and he measured the thumb, with the thumb and the index finger of his other hand. "He's within about *that* of arrest, deportation and the guillotine," he said. "And thanks to whom? . . . why, thanks to you and your miserable little passions and your perpetual desire for reinforcement of your self-esteem."

"Isn't that rather unfair?" replied Dominique calmly. "Don't you leave out a few faults—just a few—on his side? I have killed nobody, and what there is between him and me is not something I'm prepared to discuss with a person like you."

"You went down to his shop this afternoon," said Barry. "You asked that man, Luis, for money. He gave some to you, and with that money you bought the dress you were wearing this evening."

"You should be a private detective, shouldn't you? You have just the right air for a divorce court. And why shouldn't I go to Luis? I have a child—Desmond's child. Some money is supposed to be paid for her each month, but this month it wasn't paid. No doubt it was put to better use! And you're wrong about the dress, just as you're wrong about everything else. The dress was ordered and paid for a week ago. What are you, anyway . . . a pansy, a *maricon*, or something? I always did think there was something queer about your liking for Desmond."

"That's a most ingenious explanation," said Barry. "It had not occurred to me. You must allow me to compliment you upon it. But, unfortunately, the situation remains unchanged. I now hold you, and you will do what I say, and do it when I say it."

"Will I? So you propose to tell him, do you? But are you quite sure that he won't kill you, too, and then himself?"

"Would you *like* him to kill himself?" said Barry. "I suppose, from your point of view, that is the best solution? Then, in your old age, when playing bridge with your decrepit friends, you could say, while shuffling cards, that of your three husbands the first, although deplorable, was the one you liked the best."

"Oh, don't . . ." she said, and she put up her hand, with fingers wide and tremulous, between her face and his. "Oh, don't . . . oh, don't, I am not what you think, and you're not as good as you think, either."

"Then talk," he said, and drank his brandy.

Moulay Hassan stirred. With a pudgy hand he brushed away a fly; and Barry, after coming up for present consolation, dived again into the immediate past.

But in that past, Dominique had made no reply to his request, but had merely watched him sip his brandy.

"Why won't you talk?" he had said. "Have you nothing at all to say to me?"

"Why should I say anything to you? You speak to me as if I were a whore. You think of yourself, I can't imagine why, as if you were some kind of avenging angel. I don't want to talk to you. You wouldn't understand."

"Whether I understand you or not has no importance." He rose and almost everything which he had ever been taught rose within him, as a counter, like a boxer's blow, to his sentimentality. He walked over to the mantelpiece. He put the cup down on a table, where he could more easily investigate its contents. He removed from it twenty-seven *sachets*. Having counted them, he placed them in his coat pocket. The pocket bulged. He patted it, then transferred some of the *sachets* to the other pocket.

"Put those back, please, where you found them," she said.

"Don't be silly," he answered. "I am being kind . . . comparatively. You're not an addict yet. I doubt if you'll ever become one, because you only do it for excitement and, as you would say, 'to forget things'. Anyway, I'm pretty sure that I've left you enough to taper off. Shall we see?" He crossed the room, began to open the drawers of her writing-desk. In the third drawer down, beneath a photograph album, he found six more *sachets*. He handed these to her. "That should be enough to do the job," he said. "Spread them out, like the margarine upon the prison bread you'll be eating if you don't. D'you understand?" He still had the photograph album in his hand. They must have bought this album, he thought, and the camera, too, in the days when they were griping poor: the album itself was far from resplendent; the camera employed certainly not the smart Leica, hanging now, enclosed within its leather sheath, from a peg inside her hall.

He opened the album, casually at first; then with increasing attention. There were photographs of Thornton, photographs of the two children, photographs of her. There was nothing recent. That, presumably, was kept in another album, and another drawer.

"Did you scoop the lot when you left?" he said, flipping the pages.

"And why shouldn't I?" she replied. "That was my first home. Nobody could say that it was his."

He placed the album on the desk. "Now listen to me," he said. "Captain Cook, and many other great explorers whom I admire, embarked whole cases of bead necklaces, and even in one instance periwigs, which they distributed as the occasion arose to the admiring natives. The Government followed when landing became safe, signed a treaty of friendship; this treaty implemented in due course by outright annexation and the first crop of missionaries. I don't myself propose to go further than the stage of the beads. You like beads. I make them. Do we understand one another?"

"No," said Dominique. "Why do you talk of beads?" she raised a hand to her neck.

Barry observed her doing this. "Don't tell me he gave you pearls?" he said.

She made no reply.

"You are becoming quite Spanish," he said.

She looked at his chin. "What do you know of Spanish women, except those you have met in Tangiers and Tetuan?" she said. "You know nothing."

"Now you are being very French," he said.

"It is past four o'clock," she said. "Won't you go?"

"Yes: in due course. But, first, I want you to understand this . . . you are an essential witness in an affair which concerns your husband closely. You, and only you, can condemn him, and unless you stop now, you will be taken up on a drug charge and obliged to do that."

"You are so clever, aren't you?" said Dominique. "You come from every side, don't you?"

"Tell me which side to come from, then."

She looked at him for a long time. Then she spoke: "I come from none," she said. "I am myself. I always was. Now I am more so."

"Ah, yes?" He gave her a meditative glance.

"My father came here," she said. "He came here, and he said that he would have nothing more to do with me. I didn't worry very much because I had an aunt whom I loved more than I loved him, but when that aunt also wrote to say that she would

have nothing more to do with me, then I thought . . . well, since they don't like me any more, why should I like them?"

He stared at her. "Don't worry," he said. "You'll be all right. People like you are always all right." He paused. "Do you *want* to marry Llvanneras?" he said.

"I'm considering it."

"Didn't you want to go on the stage at one time . . . didn't you want to do quite a number of other things?"

"I am still considering doing them."

"Then why don't you go away and do them? Listen: I'll make you a proposition. Not because I like you: I don't like you at all. Not because I think you'd be a good actress: you're far too good in private, to be any use upon the boards . . ."

"How charmingly you put things, don't you?" said Dominique.

"I'm not here to be charming but to save several people, including myself, a lot of trouble. You like money. I have a lot of money. If you will agree to go to Paris and promise not to communicate with your husband—or with anyone else in Spain—for three years I will put two million francs at your disposal."

"Why?"

"Because there are too many weak links in what's going on at present, and you are the weakest of them all."

"But I don't want to go to Paris."

"No, at the moment, very likely you don't. You're too comfortable here, I dare say, but if you could see even a centimetre in front of your pretty nose you'd realise that you're in a situation which can't go on."

"And supposing I wished to return to Desmond?"

"I think I've put a stop to that by this night's work."

"You mean that you'd really tell him?"

"I don't make threats in vain."

They stared at each other; he with contempt, she with hatred. Then she spoke, slowly: "So you admit that he might take me back, then?"

"I admit that there's no limit to his appalling sentimentality." He raised his head. "Your child is crying," he said, and he watched her as she left the room.

When she returned, she was crying. "Is something wrong with the child?" he said.

"I don't know. She seems feverish. She usually sleeps so well."

"Maybe it's emotional," he said. "Maybe her small, unconscious mind is grieving because she sees her mamma so seldom?"

Dominique flung herself on the sofa, sobbing. "How can you speak like that?" she said. "Have you no pity at all? After all, what have I done? I am not so wicked. I only wanted happiness."

He sat down beside her on the sofa. "I never said you were wicked," he said. "I only suggest that you have great powers of self-persuasion. You can keep whole parts of your conscience quiet for weeks at a time, too. You have a rare advantage there." She turned her head at this and, as he continued, she watched him. "It would be nice, now, wouldn't it," he said, "if your child caught a cold, and then pneumonia, and died?"

"How *can* you say such a terrible thing . . ."

"I'm not saying that I wish it. I'm only suggesting that it would round things off nicely . . . just like one of those Elizabethan dramas with widows tearing their hair out and corpses all over the stage. A prince or some other dignitary usually appears at such moments, to pronounce a few words of polite regret, and of admonition to the audience. That would be me, in this case, I suppose."

"I think you must be quite inhuman," she said.

"Then you would be wrong," he answered. "I am very much human . . . a little too cold, perhaps, a little too inclined to reflect; but then you must remember that I come of farming stock. My ancestors were accustomed to looking at pools of spilt milk. I don't know why people say you shouldn't cry over spilt milk. One has only to tug at the teats of a cow to replace it." He put his hand on her shoulder. "I can't help Thornton's character," he said. "I suppose the poor bastard was born with it; he's certainly done nothing to improve it since. In some ways I admire the damned fool, but never where women are concerned. I treat women as human beings, not as instruments to my sensuality or as fabulous creatures who have lost their wings and find walking difficult because they can't maintain their equilibrium. When we were young, I was a bigger fool than Desmond was . . . much bigger. I suppose it's often that way. I suppose his potential intelligence is greater than mine, but then he was lucky enough to have Gloria . . ."

She raised herself upon her elbow. "Did you love Gloria?" she said.

"Yes, I think I must have loved her, though I didn't know it at the time, and if I had known it I'd have been very miserable; so perhaps it was just as well."

"It's not me who is being sentimental now," she said.

"No. You're quite right there. It's me. But I promise you it's very rare, and never lasts more than two minutes. There was . . . there still is . . . another person whom I loved. She lives in France now. I'm glad she's made a success of things. This one I always knew I loved, but thank God I can put these things away, and take them out like you do your photographs, no doubt . . . just for a quick peep, and even that, only from time to time. I'd have been no use to that girl. I'd have wrecked her life. And so I went away."

Dominique sat up. She touched her eyes gently with her fingertips. When she cried her eyelids never swelled, but afterwards they would wrinkle, as by the action of some astringent lotion.

"That's what you say now," she said. "But did you actually go away at the time? Wasn't it perhaps more confused than that? Are you sure you're not arranging things in retrospect? And didn't you go back, too?"

"Yes, I went back. Ten years later."

"You haven't answered the first part of my question."

"Only because it doesn't require an answer. I went away. That is all; and quite enough, too. If I fixed things for my own glory inside my head, then at least I kept them there."

"It's half-past four," she said.

"Yes, it's half-past four and your child is ill, and your coffee's cold, and you'd do well not to begin again stupidities, like this," he patted his pocket where the *sachets* lay. He rose. "Now listen to me," he said. "I am nobody's judge, and certainly not yours. If I've seemed hard to you, then that's because it's necessary at this moment to be hard, for the good of all. Your nature is not acquisitive, really—but generous. The more I see of you, the more I see how Desmond has left his rather sloppy mark on you. I say 'sloppy', but that is what it is: you are trying hard to live up to ideals which, to him, have for years been no more than pleasant theories. Desmond reminds me of Rousseau, sometimes: Rousseau wrote the *Contrat Social* but left his newborn children, surreptitiously, at night, in the doorway of the local foundling hospital. He also attempted to prostitute his wife . . .

and don't let there be any mistake about it, that is what Desmond has done to you."

"I do what I please," she said.

"It pleases you to think so, but, in point of fact, you do what has been forced upon you by the criminal stupidity of your husband. Now listen to me; because I'm going, and I shall not be coming back. My offer stands. You must leave Spain, but while you were with the kid I was thinking about it. You can do as you please. You can forget the business about the three years; but you don't cross this frontier again until this business is settled."

"Won't your Spanish friend in Madrid have something to say about this?" said Dominique. "Does he authorise you to make this offer?"

"My Spanish friend is a delightful and intelligent man," replied Barry. "But, like many Castilians, he is subject to emotional attacks, during which he endeavours to behave in a manner which I understand is known as *caballeresco*. His dignity doesn't permit him to interfere directly, himself, but I am his sure delegate. Indeed, I think I can say that I interpret his secret wishes entirely."

"Are you quite certain of that?" she said. For the first time, for the first time since he had imitated a comedian whose name he had forgotten, at dinner, she smiled.

"You won't marry Llavaneras," he said, "and Llavaneras won't marry you. It looks very pleasant, very healthy, just now; but how will it look in one year's time? You thrive on waiting, you think . . . well, yes, perhaps you do; but waiting for Desmond while *your* father makes up his mind is one thing, but waiting for an amateur jockey to obtain his omnipotent father's permission is quite another." He paused and, for seconds, he looked at her, and she met his eyes. "Go to France," he said. "Square things with your boy-friend, or square them with Desmond. . . . do what you please, but go there and, incidentally, take your child to one of the two countries to which she belongs. I will have the money put at your disposal in the Crédit Lyonnais, in the Boulevard MacMahon, the day after to-morrow. You need never see me again in your life . . . never. If you wish, and it hurts you to take my money, you can go to a lawyer and give me a nice little document which I'll be able to produce when your father dies and you inherit those dry acres in the Languedoc."

"How do you know that I will inherit them?"

"I took the trouble to find out. I used an old chum of Desmond's for the purpose, too: a man called Heras; I've an idea you must know him."

"Yes, I do," she said. "I bathed a wound of his once, in Valencia."

"Exactly. Heras was no doubt bathing another of his many wounds while he was running round your home town of Pézénac under the fond delusion that he was helping to destroy the capitalist system. Perhaps I should also add that I took the opportunity to discover that you were thinking of leaving your employment here, too?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I know the way your mind works, Dominique. I've no doubt it's terribly impressive to Catalan industrialists who spent the whole Spanish Civil War in San Sebastian, terribly impressive for them, to hear you threaten to go and be a nurse in Indo-China—but I don't think it's even funny . . . not me. Some of the methods which you took from Desmond don't suit you at all . . . oh no, by God, believe you me, they don't."

She rose. She went over to the table. She drank some of the cold coffee, and the moon shone on her hair and sent shadows from her cheek-bones to the wall.

"Will it ever end, do you think?" she said.

"You could make it end."

"Not now. It's all so much diminished. Everything is dirty now."

"Ah, you all say that, you debilitated people. Then you come again and say that's it's all dirty . . . yes, indeed it is, for you . . . except the lovely, distant past. But, of course, for you, at your age, it takes time for the past to *become* a past. I'm going now." He left the room, moved through the hall. There was an umbrella, impeccably and neatly furled, hanging on a Balmoral-size pair of antlers above the coat-stand. He touched the metal tip, set the umbrella swinging. No doubt he helped himself by doing this.

"You needn't see me out," he said.

"I have to come downstairs for the door," she answered.

In the lift they did not talk.

She opened the door. The moon was now full on them: full, with its soda-water gleam.

ood-bye," she said.

"*Adiós, guapa . . .*"

"You made up your mind to say that when you left, some time ago, didn't you?" said Dominique.

"Yes, I did as a matter of fact. It expresses everything."

"But does it express the present circumstances?"

"No, perhaps not . . . but does that matter . . .?"

He was standing in the open doorway when he said that. When she heard what he said, she slammed the door. He put his foot out to prevent her closing it, but all he received for his assiduity was a nasty pinch upon his instep. He fell back, hopping, clutching shoe-leather, and saw her laughing at him behind the well-barred panes of plated glass.

Love is a very curious emotion. Unlike the other, apparent, constants in the human life, this malady, once firmly seated, will suffer neither abrogation nor attenuation, remains impervious to ridicule, is inimical to lust, and thrives most, at last, when, all comedy past, lust, its first victim, is left alive, but feeble.

Barry shouted something through the door, about the bank. Then he had—what he had not enjoyed for almost an entire hour—a sudden access of common-sense which unclenched fists and smoothed an embattled, rumpled forehead.

He turned and walked away.

"*Aubagne . . . Aubagne.*"

Barry tapped Moulay Hassan on the knee. The man awoke.

"Marcel Pagnol was born here," said Barry. "It is also where we begin to walk."

"Very well," said Moulay. He rose and stretched himself, surveyed a passing gendarme with the utmost unconcern, descended, and, perceiving a weighing machine, asked Barry to provide him with a coin. "I have lost three kilos since last night," he said. "I know this for a certainty, because we had a domestic machine in the bathroom at the house."

On the way out, he insisted on buying a *Viandox* in the station buffet. He also asked to be shown the Marseille newspaper, *Le Provençal*, and, when shown and provided with this sheet, talked knowledgeably and with authority, in his beautiful French, to a gradually increasing number of railway personnel concerning

the hopes and prospects of the *Olympique de Marseille* in the French football cup.

There are many forms of love. Barry took the old man's arm as they set off along the asphalt road towards the first village in which he conceived it would be safe to take a taxi.

Fifteen

ONE DAY LATER. Madrid. Aranjuez's office. A door R; another door L.R. The room is comfortably furnished. There is a turkish carpet on the floor. Aranjuez, a delicate yet wiry figure, is seated behind his desk. Inspector Marius Poinot, an equally delicate but less wiry figure, sits facing him. The Inspector is almost completely bald. He has a moustache so black that one cannot help feeling that it owes its colour, to some extent at least, to artificial aids. At present, the Inspector is piercing a cigar with a toothpick.

"Would you object if I opened the window?" enquired Aranjuez politely.

"*Mais vous êtes chez vous, cher monsieur,*" replied Poinot. "*D'ailleurs, comme vous voyez bien, je garde mon pardessus.*" He turned up the collar of his overcoat as Aranjuez rose, adjusted his scarf, as the latter opened the window with the fine, abandoned gesture of an Aztec priest welcoming the gory dawn of sacrifice.

"I am fond of fresh air," said Aranjuez, as he looked down at the withered shrubs and the moist gravel of his courtyard. Then he turned. "I am sure that you should not wear the rosette of the Legion of Honour when abroad," he said, and he pointed to the spot of red upon his visitor's lapel.

"That is perfectly correct," replied Poinot. "But my wife sewed it in, and so well that I cannot take it out; even with scissors, although I have tried. And since I have only one overcoat I gave up the attempt."

"You are a delightful man: it is a pleasure to cross blunderbusses with you," said Aranjuez. "Only the other day I was reading an instructive book—we Spaniards, you must understand, are much given to empirical analysis of life: within the limits

described by the Church, of course—and this book told me that I should endeavour to breathe deeply as often as possible. That gives one a great advantage, apparently. As you can perhaps see, it is giving me one at this moment.” He snorted in front of the Frenchman. “If you do not breathe deeply,” he said, “you are liable to endure terrible trials. Your pulse will accelerate, your heart will be subject to palpitations, your hands will most certainly tremble: worse, you will inevitably be overcome by confused but nevertheless identifiably erotic desires.”

“We have such books in France,” said Poinot. “I was on a case concerning a printer in Aix-en-Provence only last month.”

“We are not talking of the kind of books you mean, my dear fellow,” said Aranjuez, “but of Man’s constant and pathetic endeavour, with the aid of the reasoning quality upon which he takes such pride, to consider himself superior to certain beasts of the field, and the beehive. The book I mention is very representative of its kind. It does its best to present science to the unscientific, and has one sublime phrase which I cannot restrain myself from giving to you in the original. Will you permit me to do so?”

“I can’t see any way out of it,” said Inspector Poinot.

“*En una palabra, nos sentimos nerviosos y tenemos necesidad de desahogar los nervios con movimiento . . .*” said Aranjuez. “That is what they write.” He looked at Poinot: “Does that apply to you, would you say?”

“No,” said Poinot.

“You would perhaps like me to change the subject?”

“I have been waiting patiently for you to do so for half an hour.”

“Are you not enjoying your visit to Madrid?”

“I am becoming rather tired of my visits to Madrid.”

“I trust you have no complaint to make of me, personally? My men have been instructed to follow you about with all discretion.”

“I cannot even go to a *Zarzuela* without two of them in the seats behind breathing down my neck,” said Poinot. He lit his cigar and placed the toothpick carefully in an ashtray. “Let us come to the point,” he said. “I want that man Thornton. When are you going to give him to me?”

“But, my dear fellow, it is hardly my affair—I do not deal with

criminal cases, as you know—but I feel sure that if you show your extradition order to the proper authorities they will be delighted to oblige you.”

“I have no extradition order, and cannot obtain one on circumstantial evidence alone. You must be perfectly aware of that.”

“In this book I was reading, which is called *Las Llaves de La Vida—The Keys of Life*,” said Aranjuez, “an unanswerable case is made out for the proposition that men with round faces should marry thin-faced wives. It is as good as Voltaire, though rather less witty. The whole subject is treated very superficially, of course. Had it not been, I’m sure that an equally good case would have been made out for the kidnapping of round-faced Englishmen by thin-faced French detectives.”

“I should not have thought the word ‘*kidnapping*’ was one which you would wish to use freely at this particular moment,” said Poinsof.

“Yes, it has quite banished the activities of the Queen of England from the front page, hasn’t it?” said Aranjuez, and he held up a copy of *France-Soir* in which the Gallic ignorance of the first principles of newspaper layout served but to emphasise the static drama of a picture of Moulay Hassan eating something that looked rather like a *mille-feuilles*.

“What an extraordinary occurrence,” continued Aranjuez. “I wonder where he can be? Of course, we should have been obliged to keep the whole thing quiet, but then you are a democracy . . . such secrecy is not possible, is it, in France where every elector is entitled to know the colour of the President’s socks?”

“You know as well where that man is now as I do,” said Poinsof. “You also know as well as I do the manufacturers’ names which we find on fragments of bombs exploded in mosques in Morocco, and in settler’s home in Tunisia.”

“How curious that you should mention Tunisia,” said Aranjuez. “You have exiled so many of the more honest men there, too; in islands, I’m told. I should have thought that a nation which had had its greatest man imprisoned, first in Elba, then in St. Helena, would have had an aversion to islands—but no, it seems not. You put Bazaine on one in the Mediterranean and Pétain on another in the Atlantic.”

“Bazaine escaped to Spain, if you remember,” said Poinsof.

"He also died here," said Aranjuez.

The two men stared at one another.

"I have never yet failed to make an arrest in a murder case," said Poinot.

"My dear fellow," said Aranjuez, "with all due respect that is not a very imposing boast. It is rather like a man with a pistol declaring that he knows how to fire the weapon: he doesn't necessarily hit anything. How many convictions have you obtained? That seems to me more important. Your French juries are so notoriously sentimental."

"I think I shall obtain one here."

"Well, you have certainly been persevering. How long is it now? . . . more than two years, I believe, and you have paid me at least five visits. Most praiseworthy, most praiseworthy."

"Shall I tell you how I intend to proceed?" said Poinot.

"My dear Poinot, I sit at your feet. There is nothing I enjoy more than to study another man's methods."

Poinot decapitated ash from his cigar. He tucked his right thumb inside his waistcoat. He now presented the appearance of a Radical-Socialist mayor about to suggest an increase in the water rate. "I knew within two months of beginning the investigation that Thornton had committed this crime," he said.

"Yes, that is what you have always told me."

"I also knew, since there was no record of his stay in France, that he must have come, and left again, by boat."

"It was intelligent of you to realise that," said Aranjuez. He looked at Poinot ironically. "You rejected the idea that he might have jumped by parachute, I take it?" he said.

"If you merely wish to be sarcastic at my expense," said Poinot, "I will cease talking."

"No . . . no . . . please go on, please! How did you discover about the boat, incidentally?"

"It was not very difficult," said Poinot. "There was a smuggling operation that night within a mile of Bédoule. I found fresh car tracks on the grass within a hundred yards of the beach. Although we seldom arrest smugglers, because it is really not worth while, we know the organisations which deal with the French side of their business in Marseille."

"Ah, yes?"

"I arrested two individuals. After they had been seven months,

in the Chaves prison, they became bored. The wife of one of them was about to have a child by another man. He was anxious to obtain his release in order to deal with his private affairs. He therefore told me the name of the organisation in Tangiers with which he had been dealing."

"And did you release him?"

"Naturally. I am a man of my word."

"And did he deal with his private affairs?"

"Yes, he murdered his wife's lover the same evening. He was tried at Aix-en-Provence only the other day, and acquitted. Extreme provocation, you understand? Afterwards he came up to me and begged to be sent back to prison. He thought he would be safer there."

"I can well believe it. And did you oblige him?"

"I did not. I am against the wastage of valuable manpower. I advised him to enlist in the Foreign Legion. France needs brave soldiers in Indo-China."

Aranjuez chuckled. "Go on," he said.

"It was not very difficult to find out the name of the boat in Tangiers, nor that of its skipper," said Poinot.

"I agree," said Aranjuez. "When I set my mind to the problem, it took me precisely twenty-four hours."

It was Poinot's turn to chuckle. "And did it take you long to discover that Thornton was supposed to have been staying in Tangiers at the time of the murder?" he asked.

"About ten further minutes."

"A small difficulty arises at this point . . ." said Poinot.

"Then let us smooth it out together, my dear friend," replied Aranjuez gallantly.

"The owner of that boat appears subsequently to have entered your service . . ."

"Now what can have given you that bizarre idea?"

"A report from our Deuxième Bureau in Paris," said Poinot. "Also this . . ." He leant over the desk, and held up the newspaper.

"You will hardly expect me to do otherwise than indignantly deny your indelicate suggestion," replied Aranjuez playfully.

"Even between four walls, and when we are alone together?" said Poinot.

"That is an even more indelicate suggestion," said Aranjuez.

"Besides, how do you know we are alone? To begin with, you forget the tape recorder."

"No, I don't," said Poinot. "Look . . .!" He bent and lifted a disconnected plug and stretch of flex from beneath the desk.

"You are a man of parts, Inspector Poinot," said Aranjuez. "I feel obliged to tell you, however, that there is another one by the window."

"Is there?" said Poinot. "Ah well, never mind. The advantage in this conversation is more likely to be mine than yours, I fear."

"That remains to be seen, of course. However, please proceed."

"I will light another cigar first, I think," said Poinot. He began to prepare the cigar, watched by Aranjuez. Neither man spoke for several minutes until:

"I told you that I am not concerned with political matters, but only with crime," said Poinot delicately.

"The two questions, alas, are so closely connected," replied Aranjuez.

"Yes, that is what I think, too," said Poinot. He leaned forward. "Are you not perhaps very interested in a man called Heras . . . Domingo or Dionien Heras?" he said.

"I am interested in many people."

"I took this Heras into custody the other day, just before I came here."

"Did you? And upon what charge?" It would be incorrect to say that Aranjuez had started, but undoubtedly there was now a tenseness not hitherto observable in his manner.

"He was arrested while riding a bicycle without a rear reflector lamp. His identity card was also more than two months out of date."

Aranjuez smiled. "These are grave accusations," he said.

"They are quite sufficient, since he is a foreigner, to keep him in Toulouse prison for as long as I desire," said Poinot.

"And how long will that be, do you think?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It seems rather to depend on you. I thought you might be interested in effecting an exchange with me."

"Your suggestion is certainly ingenious," said Aranjuez, "but, as I expect you have discovered in your own field, it is sometimes to one's advantage *not* to arrest a man, but to leave him at liberty.

to play the fool. The damage which Heras does me is very small, but in doing it he leads me to other people who are rather more important and dangerous." He paused, took hold of a paper-cutter, tapped with it lightly on the desk. "Now, if you could offer me one of *those* people, I might be interested . . . but I fear it is unlikely that they proceed about their business without their documents in order and the regulation lights at each end of their expensive motor-cars."

Poinsot appeared quite unperturbed by this reply. "I thought you might say that," he said. "But, of course, there is the effect upon Thornton of this news to be considered, too."

"I would advise you not to over-estimate that," said Aranjuez. "The two men are hardly twin souls, from all I hear; though they undoubtedly share minds with but a single thought." He stroked his nose gently with the paper-cutter. "Of course . . ." he said. "Your idea might be to charge Heras with the murder in the hope that Thornton, hearing of it, might feel impelled to . . ." He broke off and examined Poinsot with amusement. "But no! I really think that, in that case, you overestimate the chivalry of harassed Englishmen. Besides, why should Thornton bother? How could you substantiate such a charge against Heras? He was hundreds of miles away at the time."

"Yes, that is what he keeps on saying, in his cell, when we interrogate him," said Poinsot.

"That is no doubt because it is impossible to overestimate the chivalry of even very undesirable Spaniards," said Aranjuez, but he looked at Poinsot keenly, none the less. "So you keep on at him, do you?" he said. "You keep on at him. And if I know anything of French interrogation methods, he is probably in the prison hospital with an injured pancreas by now. Well, I can assure that, as from to-morrow, the Spanish Consul will call daily at the prison . . . and twice daily, if necessary."

"And you think that this obdurate Spanish Republican would receive your Consul, or even any favour from him?" said Poinsot.

"I most sincerely hope not," said Aranjuez. "I should be very disappointed if he did do so." He looked at Poinsot. "But blood, the terrible, communal blood, is more powerful than the wishy-wash of international socialism. Even the North Americans, with their remarkable invention—the schoolboy aged fifty—seem to have realised this. The other invention of those people is the

stockade, from the apertures of which they fire upon all who dare to suggest that they are perhaps not the descendants of pioneers. These people hate each other, but of course it is necessary for them to pretend that they crossed the Atlantic not because, as was in more than half their cases true, they were incompetent to earn a living in Europe, but in order to find Freedom. . . freedom, well, really, I ask you."

"Couldn't you ask me something more connected with our little talk?" said Poinot.

"Certainly! Of what use is it to you to get Thornton? Why not leave him alone?"

"For you to deal with when you have no further use for him?" said Poinot.

"You were more interested in his wife, I think, at one time," said Aranjuez.

"Possibly; but that is no longer the case."

"I have an idea that his wife may be going back to France . . . to Paris," said Aranjuez.

"Ah yes? And how do you know that?"

"I had a man, perched apparently, most uncomfortably—he has asked for extra pay in order to have his trousers repaired—in a peach tree, opposite her house, the other night. It seems a most inadequate way of concealing oneself, but no doubt she thought he was a bat, or a cluster of bats. I have a well-deserved reputation as a mind-reader. It is even said that my personality is so strong, so wilful, that I can influence people." He paused. "The man who owns the boat was seen leaving the building at five in the morning," he said.

"You are trying, if I may say so, to confuse the issue," said Poinot. "The man with the boat doesn't matter to me now. Nor even does the wife: she has ceased to be an important witness. Would you like me to tell you why?"

"Yes, very much indeed."

"Let us go back to the beginning," said Poinot. "The dead man, Carter, and Thornton were colleagues in the Consular Service. They had not served together in recent years, but I have made enquiries in England and have discovered that they knew each other quite well in the past . . . during the war."

"Ah yes? That is interesting."

Poinot stroked his nose. "It is not for me to surmise whether

they were on bad terms even then. The obvious motive ~~in~~ this case is jealousy, but there may be another, more complex. No doubt Thornton will explain himself when the time comes."

"Go on."

"The pair met again for one day, when Thornton was passing through Barcelona. Two days later, Carter left to spend a three-week holiday in Bédoule, the very place where Thornton's wife was living, waiting to join him when his appointment at Valencia became operative."

"Quite so—and why not? I'm told it's a very pretty little town."

"You are being disingenuous, Aranjuez. My first enquiries showed that Carter spent a great deal of time in Madame Thornton's company . . . in fact, that he pursued her in a most determined manner."

"~~That~~ doesn't mean that he became her lover, does it?"

"I never said it did. It's quite sufficient for my purpose that Thornton believed it to be true. Incidentally, he telephoned his wife on three occasions from Spain during that period, and after each of these conversations she appeared to be very much agitated."

"How do you know that? I hope you haven't been corrupting Spanish telephone operators, my friend."

"I had no need to. The first two calls were made to a café, the third to a public telephone in the building where she was living. Several people noticed that she seemed upset on each occasion."

"It's a *concierge* you should be, not a policeman," said Aranjuez.

"You insult a magnificent body of women, and my most valuable allies," said Poinsoot, grinning. "Actually," he continued, "I believe that Thornton killed the wrong man, but that's neither here nor there: he did the job. All else is unimportant."

"Including proof?" said Aranjuez mildly.

"The most convincing form of proof is a confession," said Poinsoot, "and, as I will show you presently, I think, I can obtain one. However, since you're so interested in defending Thornton, here is something to be going on with."

He opened his brief-case, produced from it a single sheet of paper, laid this sheet of paper on the desk. Aranjuez studied it.

"Our very dear old friend, the anonymous letter," he said.

"Posted in Barcelona three weeks ago, and declaring, as you see, that it might be in my interest to question Thornton concerning Carter's death," said Poinot.

"Yes, I can read French, you know," said Aranjuez.

"Then perhaps you can read that this is bad French," said Poinot. "Do you notice something else about it, too?"

"Should I notice something?"

"There was a letter-heading at the top of the paper. It has been removed. There is also a watermark . . . a rather unusual watermark, if you care to look at it."

Aranjuez held the paper against the light. "So there is!" he said. "So there is. You are really the very devil of a fellow, aren't you? May I ask if you have succeeded in tracing this watermark?"

"Not yet," said Poinot. "But I will."

Aranjuez considered the Frenchman in silence for some moments. Then he rose, went over to a filing cabinet in the corner of the room, opened a drawer, searched in a folder, returned with a second sheet of paper which he laid on the desk.

Poinot was considerably taken aback. "So you received one, too," he said. He was quite obviously far from pleased.

"It seems only elementary courtesy that I should," said Aranjuez. "After all, the writer was living in Spain. He even takes the trouble to write to me in Spanish, too, you notice". . . though this may be because he thought I didn't understand French." He gazed at Poinot sardonically.

"What d'you think is the meaning of this, then?" said Poinot. It cost him an effort to ask this question because he did not enjoy seeing the initiative of the conversation escaping from him.

"You are really unable to identify that watermark?" said Aranjuez.

"Up to the present . . . no."

"It is the royal arms of England," said Aranjuez. "The paper is British official notepaper, and both letters were written by an employee of that country's Consulate in Barcelona."

"Who, and why, though?"

"He is probably a young man called Fife," said Aranjuez. "As to his motive, I should say it was congenital spite, mixed with resentment at being unable to secure the affections of the

irresistible Mrs. Thornton . . . though no doubt, if you asked him, he would reply that he thought he was performing a public duty."

"Well, it is clear that he knows the truth; or at least suspects it. Do you think he would be willing to come forward as a witness?"

"I should say there was nothing more unlikely," replied Aranjuez.

"You would not be prepared to give him a hint . . . to exert a little pressure upon him? After all, he is accredited to your country."

"I would not, sir."

"Then I shall have to put into operation my other plan," said Poinot.

"Ah, yes . . . the one with Heras?" said Aranjuez. He began to tap again on the desk with the paper-cutter. "Now listen to me," he continued. "No doubt you thought that idea a good one, but if so, you were stupid to tell me about it. In the first place, I must ask you, formally, to stop being unpleasant to Heras . . . in the second, I doubt entirely whether you'll have the slightest reaction from Thornton when he hears about it."

"I was not thinking of Heras," said Poinot.

"No?"

"I was thinking of somebody quite different."

"Good God, you haven't been putting anybody else in prison, have you?"

"Not yet—but I now propose to."

Aranjuez stared at him.

"Where is Thornton now?" said Poinot slowly.

"My dear fellow, how should I know? This is not a bureau for the discovery of missing persons."

"I think you know very well," said Poinot.

"I dare say you do. If it were possible to control people's thoughts and not merely their actions, I should be unemployed."

"Very well," said Poinot. "It is of no importance, really. He will come forward within a few days now, and I anticipate many a pleasant talk with him." He took out his cigar case. Only one cigar remained. He looked at it regretfully. "Do you remember my saying that I was not satisfied that Carter was Madame Thornton's lover?" he said.

"I do."

"One of the reasons I said that is because I think I know who the real lover was. He also happens to be the last man who saw Carter alive."

"Explain yourself."

"I shall be delighted," said Poirsot, and, indeed, he was quite evidently delighted: he actually rubbed his hands together. "Carter gave a dinner party in his hotel that evening," he said. "This young man was present. His name is Gilbert Bélier. Also present were a Czech painter and his wife, who have a certain importance in the affair because they were intimate friends of the Thorntons; particularly of Madame Thornton, and thus well acquainted with her private life."

"About which you have questioned them, I suppose

"I have. I don't know whether you've noticed it but I have found that when people are determined to be discreet they tell you, in fact, much more than when they gossip."

"People are so seldom discreet with me," said Aranjuez.

Poinsot smiled at him benignly. "About one o'clock the painter and his wife went away—the hotel, I must explain, is some distance from the town, overlooking a beach. Young Bélier, on his own admission, remained talking to Carter beside the sea wall for about fifteen minutes. He says that they were discussing philosophy. This seems to me unlikely. One is always inclined to discuss philosophy after a good dinner, but for rather longer, I would have thought, than a mere quarter of an hour."

"And so what were they discussing, would you say?" enquired Aranjuez.

"I think they were discussing Madame Thornton," said Poirsot. "One man was, I suspect, her lover. The other had wished to be her lover. What else should they discuss in the circumstances but the disposal of her body? Besides, as I have discovered during my enquiries, Carter was essentially a malicious man. Several chambermaids have told me so, and also other ladies; some of them well-known to me. Carter appears to have made a great impression upon people during his three weeks' stay in Bédoule." He paused. "I don't know why people have to be so promiscuous," he said. "All my experience shows me that they get but small satisfaction out of it, and, indeed, expose themselves at every turn to prison sentences."

"Go on," said Aranjuez. This was not the moment for wit.

"Bélier then went home, leaving Carter alone beside the wall," said Poinso. "That is what he says. His parents, who had no right to be awake at that hour, confirm his statement: they heard him enter their villa; and subsequently they heard sounds suggestive of a young and rather drunk young man considering the question that sleep is undoubtedly necessary to human beings; and temporarily rejecting the idea."

"Let me try and help you," said Aranjuez. "The evidence of blood relations is not admissible in French courts, except only in extenuation? That is your proposition, isn't it?"

"Exactly," said Poinso. He stared distastefully at Aranjuez's paper-cutter. "Also," he added gently, "when a man is found dead, as in this case, only in the morning, when at least six hours had passed, it is difficult to determine to more than within an hour or two the time of death." He looked askant at Aranjuez. "He was found in water, too, which always complicates the surgeon's problem. He was wearing a white dinner-jacket. Air had made the jacket bubble up. The fisherman who first sighted him thought he was a porpoise, and ran to fetch his friends. One collects a lot of incidental but interesting information in a murder case."

"So?" said Aranjuez.

"I intend to arrest Bélier, and charge him with this murder," said Poinso. "This information will be published in the entire French press, and possibly abroad, as well. Thornton will see it, and read it. I think we need have no doubt as to the result. Thornton will come."

"Where is Bélier now?" said Aranjuez.

"He is in Paris. He is a medical student. He will be in La Santé the day after to-morrow."

"And his parents?"

"Señor Aranjuez, in the course of a long experience, I have learnt to suspect all names which appear to be too specifically French. The Béliers are Roumanian Jews. They were naturalised in 1936. I do not think that they will cause any trouble."

There was silence for a moment between the two men. Then:

"And supposing Thornton cuts his throat, or puts a bullet through his head?" said Aranjuez.

"You really think he would do such a thing?" said Poinso. "I'm sure, if you do think so, you're very much mistaken."

"No, I do not think so with any resolute conviction," said Aranjuez, "though, of course, private and sentimental matters—the wife in Paris, the attitude of a certain other young woman of humble station in Barcelona—may affect his reasoning decisively, at any moment. However, the whole situation is most interesting, as you suggest. Yes, I think I can say that I haven't watched a situation of this kind with such interest since Franco dispensed with the services of Serrano Suñer."

"I would like you to look at it this way," said Poinot. "I have been married twenty-six years. I know from my own experience that a wife cannot keep, indefinitely, a secret from a vigilant husband. Women betray themselves instantly by their artificial manner. There are many actors, but I have yet to meet an adequate actress, except upon the stage." He pointed a dead cigar at Aranjuez. "Who is this new young woman whom you mention?" he said.

"Her name is Maruja, I believe," said Aranjuez. "That kind of person has always got women in reserve with names like Maruja." He paused, took one of Poinot's dead cigars: began to dissect it, most delicately, upon a green blotting-pad marked by shellbursts of red ink.

"Yes, it is really most interesting," he said. "I do feel that it is, and I have not had this particular emotion for a long time."

But when Poinot had gone, Aranjuez pressed a desk buzzer with unusual and reiterative impatience. Eventually a young man appeared.

"Should I perhaps ask for you to be issued by the Falange with a hearing aid under their amiable scheme for the help of people deprived of their senses?" said Aranjuez.

"No, señor."

"Then arrange for me that a woman called Lola Herañ, who lives at this address . . ." he handed a piece of paper to the young man, "in La Nouvelle, in the Aude department of France, shall be brought across the frontier and lodged in Figueras prison—but lodged in it with every comfort: do you understand me?"

"Si, Señor Jefe."

"You really claim to understand me?" said Aranjuez.

"No, señor."

"That's much better. I really thought for a moment that you were going to say something else." He passed across the desk

another packet to the young man: "These are instructions for the Consulate at Toulouse. They refer to the husband of this woman. They must be put into effect to-morrow morning."

The young man was evidently embarrassed. "Señor Aranjuez," he said.

"Yes?"

"I do not like to tell you this, but you have been temporarily superseded."

Upon Aranjuez's face there was no sign, no twitch of perturbation; no grimace, no quirk of lip, no narrowing of nostril: he remained, it must be said, entirely impassive.

"Ah, yes?" he said. "By whom?"

"By Esteban Gallangos."

"What! That old turnkey, that impotent whoremaster?"

"But your orders will, of course, be carried out, Señor Jefe," said the young man.

"I should certainly hope so," said Aranjuez. "They are sensible orders, but now, of course, we who are thin must give way to the caprices of a dictator who is gaining about a kilo a month, and is, in consequence, anxious to see fat people around him, plump and happy."

"May I remind you, señor, that the window tape-recorder has not been switched off?"

"I removed the spool, child, before it even started working," said Aranjuez.

Although the time was now well past the luncheon hour, Aranjuez remained in his office, seated at his desk. He smoked a cigarette in a peculiar way, with short, reflective puffs; as a woman smokes: then he drew a folder towards him, opened it, and began to read the typed pages which lay, loose, between black covers. He read these pages with considerable satisfaction because he had written them himself.

They were entitled *On various men*, and they consisted of reflections of a general nature under various sub-headings. For example (and the courtesy of a higher intervention will not occur again):⁴

The Inconstant

Why, when one talks of inconstancy, does one invariably refer to an instability which concerns the sentiments alone? There is

an inconstancy of the will, also. The man thus afflicted perseveres in no endeavour, and success, achieved none the less from time to time, is intolerable to him. He requires the excitement of a hundred new beginnings. He is the Don Juan of the mind, and it is as impossible for him to know a genuine ambition as it was for Don Juan to know a genuine love.

The Man of Decision

He never hesitates. We respect his energy, as we admire his actions, many of them daring and original. He is lucid, courageous. The vicissitudes of life do not intimidate him: he glories in them. What, then, does he lack? Why, precisely the ability to admit that he is capable of error. The prestige which he acquires is purchased cheaply at the expense of people weaker than himself. He astonishes: one endures him, but one does not like him, and when one examines his career one sees that it is entirely incoherent, and that his apparent success is rather that of an audacious gambler than of a man of science, whose thought has roots. Too intelligent to accept the flattery of fools, he is unable to accept the impartial judgment of those whom he esteems. He has few friends. He is weak, but he is fortunate: for he is able to hide his weakness from others, and even from himself.

The Willing Prisoner

This man requires obstacles: he could not live without them. But these obstacles, these barriers, material, moral, even mystic, are, in reality, no more than a dispositive of defence from behind which he can present the illusion of will-power. The behaviour of this man is often extremely dramatic. He is like a horse of which we watch the preparations, the galloping approach towards the jump, enthralled: but at the last moment the horse will swerve aside. There was once upon a time a dog who lived in a house with a garden beside a level-crossing. Every time that a certain man who had once, years before, given the dog a kick passed along that road, the dog, seeing him from afar, would rush to the garden gate, and from behind that gate, which was closed to both himself and his enemy, would behave in a most aggressive manner. But if the gate were open—as was sometimes the case—the dog would remain quietly recumbent in the sun, apparently sleeping.

The Logician

This is my favourite. He provides me with endless amusement. His pitiless logic informs us in advance of the inanity of every undertaking. With irreproachable lucidity, he sees every risk, every remote and unpleasant consequence of the suggested line of behaviour. He is impartial. He is frequently intelligent. Were it not a degradation of a noble word, I would call him a nihilist.

The Ironist

Here the inhibition is less evident. The Ironist may well achieve many of his aims, but, of course, upon condition that it should not be *apparent* that he wishes to achieve them. The Ironist feels that were he, by some unhappy chance, to take himself seriously, other men would inevitably come to regard him as a mediocrity. The profundities of tragic passion can be reached by other and less vulgar roads, he feels, than that provided by the public highway. "I rather dislike you, really," he will say, "but if I did happen to love you, nothing else in the world would count." The child knows that he must not play with lighted matches. The child lights one, and dreams of arson. Such ideas are an essential element in the life of the Ironist: for him the possibility of action is always, inevitably, tragic. He resembles Penelope, the wife of Ulysses. He is always busy with his tapestry, and just as busy unmaking it. Of course, it is true that the Ironist is tenacious and sometimes we find that he is endeavouring to be faithful to some secret pact which he made with himself many years ago, and which has an ever diminishing application to his present circumstances. Often, too, he is victim of his own system of defence, because people become less and less inclined to take him seriously. This attitude wounds the Ironist: he is vain, very vain.

The Enemy of Time

Here the rupture of even diplomatic relations between intelligence and activity is complete. This man is an enthusiast. He pursues his goal with his entire, and too suspiciously well mobilised, energies. But when the first material difficulty arises, the temperature of his enthusiasm falls as rapidly, when the crisis is past, as that of a victim of the tertian fever. This man is often in a terrible hurry. The state of his liver, and indeed of his entire eliminatory apparatus, is closely connected with this phenomenon.

He has glimpses, which do not occur as often as he would wish, of eternity. He can be immediately identified by his eyes: an ocular paradox, because at once glaucous and brilliant. He complains, almost daily, of the passage of time. He is timid, never firm. Alternatively violent and weak, he is best named, perhaps . . . sporadic. At no moment master of himself, he behaves as exterior impulsions oblige him to behave, and in close agreement with his impulse of the moment. He is usually, however, personally sympathetic, and invariably the ready victim of women.

The Chimerical

His ideal is inaccessible. He owns the sea, but never sees it. To want something is to know that one lacks it, but this man wants nothing. His desires have nothing to do with the realities of life, but are divorced from them utterly. He can be observed sometimes in quite important employments, but more often he is seen in humble situations. Nor is the statistical distribution of this type an accident: these are the people who devise two distinct sectors to their lives. In the first they occupy some quite congenial employment, well suited to their intelligence, which is usually elevated . . . but which is, it will be discovered upon even the most casual investigation, the very, and very necessary, antithesis of their secret desires. In the other sector they bathe in their true aspirations, which, of course, cannot be realised. Such persons are particularly interesting because they present, in an adult form, a problem with which most adult persons must be eventually confronted: namely, that of their children; inasmuch as these people most closely resemble the child who accomplishes correctly the scholarly task, the examination or the interview, yet who yet retains a private, a fairy life absolutely divorced from all for which that education is so manifestly the preparation.

The Clocks Which Can't Keep Time

The disturbance of the seat of will-power, of the Grand Sympathetic, has private and distinctive signs: beneath an appearance of energy, of efficiency, one sees in all these cases, which are those of people well known to me, the signs of chaos and emotional impotence. I would not like to say that Barry Keating, for example, was. .

Aranjuez did not finish reading about Barry Keating. At least, not then, he didn't. His secretary entered. Seeing him, she started.

"Oh . . . I'm sorry . . . I didn't know you were here, Señor Aranjuez. I thought you had gone to lunch."

"What is that you have for me there?" he said.

"It's the weather report for the coast of Tunisia, Señor Aranjuez. You asked for it."

"Read it to me."

The secretary cleared her throat: "Gulf of Gabes . . . Cape Bon . . . Tunis . . . Bizerta . . . and Galite Island," she read. "Sea moderate to rough. Occasional showers. Further outlook . . . rain."

"Thank you," said Aranjuez.

"Will it be to-night, señor?" said the secretary.

"I really don't know," said Aranjuez. "I want you to buy me a dog. Send one of the messengers out to buy me a dog, will you, please?"

"But what kind of dog, Señor Aranjuez?"

"Any dog with some breeding will do," he said.

Sixteen

ON THE SECOND MORNING the sea got up as early as the sun, and began to strike padded blows of increasing force amidships. They were then off the Bonifacio Strait between Corsica and Sardinia. Thornton, who had divided the night watches with Barry, was at the wheel. A portable radio, anchored between two volumes of the *Mediterranean Pilot* on the chart desk, was giving him, in the intervals of dance music, physical culture lessons, and instructions to keen housewives as to how to make a good *polenta*, the weather reports from Marseille, Spezia and Algiers.

These were so little encouraging that he sent Corcoran below to wake Barry. When the latter entered the deck-house, he said nothing at first: he examined the charts and the misty outline of Cape Campo Moro eight miles away to port; he listened to the weather reports as described at second hand by Thornton.

"Coffee," he said to Corcoran. "In the big pot . . . and hot."

While he was waiting for his coffee, he stared at the sea, which was grey and malevolent. At that moment rain began to fall, and Campo Moro was immediately hidden by a pall of running mist. The boat was rolling, her port-holes taking surf, her decks awash with dirty water.

"The bastard Med," said Barry. "It looks like a fun-fair, and acts like a capricious whore. As if the bloody patrol boats weren't enough, God has to give it special Moabite weather." He turned to Thornton. "Turn to port. We'd best go through."

"It's forty miles through this strait," said Thornton equably.

"I may not have been here before you, chum," said Barry, "but I've certainly stayed longer. Turn to port."

Thornton turned to port.

"I didn't mean that unpleasantly," said Barry.

"No, I'm quite sure you didn't."

"The bottom of Sardinia is chopped off," said Barry. "Something happened to it in the Ice Age. We shall get back about twenty lost miles there, and have a better run in, anyway."

"I don't like you with this sea-dog manner," said Thornton.

"My dear fellow, at least I'm efficient. You had a consul-doggy manner at one time . . . and you weren't efficient. Why don't you go below now, and help? Your woman has your poor kid's head between her knees, and a bucket beneath her knees, as well."

Thornton made no reply. He turned to go, when:

"*Desmond!*" said Barry.

"Yes?" said Thornton, and looked at him.

"With that look on your face—nothing," said Barry.

Thornton went below.

"It's only last night's supper, Daddy . . . only last night's . . ." but, at this point, Barbara began to be sick again. Nuria, herself white-faced but apparently determined not to yield, was holding the child's head gently. Thornton stroked the dank, moist hair of his daughter. He laid his salty finger on her eyelids.

"It'll soon be better," he said, "soon be better," and he remembered that her mother, too, when Barbara had been a baby, had said much the same thing: "Soonbe . . . soonbe time," meaning that the milk was on the boil, or the bath running, or the pot available.

"We'll be all right presently," he said to Nuria. "We're going round by the east side of Sardinia. Barry decided it a minute ago."

"Oh, did he?" she said. "Why, then we'll see Caprera."

"Caprera?"

"Where Garibaldi lived and had his farm."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Thornton. "So we will," and he looked at her in wonder. He was always much astonished to find that other people were in possession of the rare pieces of information over which he mulled, continually, himself.

"I think that's all, for now," said Barbara. She looked up at him with moist lips and tear-stained eyes. "Was my mother seasick, too?" she said.

"I don't know," he replied. "I only went on two sea trips with her, and those were across the English Channel when the sea was calm."

"But you should know, Papa . . . surely you should know?"

Thornton looked at Nuria, who looked, quizzically, at him.

"What exactly should I know, d'you think?" he said to Nuria.

"Her attitude to death at sea, I think," said Nuria.

"Your mother, if shipwrecked, would have dived into the sea, directed one or two stupid women towards Carley floats, hit the first officious officer available with the first available spar and, once aboard his lifeboat, have enquired who, exactly, was in charge of affairs on the bridge," said Thornton. "Is that enough?" he said.

"I think it is," said Barbara. "But tell me one thing: would the poor people on the bridge have drowned, too?"

"I am quite sure they would have. There is nothing like a disaster at sea to remove all thought of social consequences. Only recently we have the case of a ship which sank. No woman was saved . . . but a large number of men were saved. I sympathise with those men, but of course the absence of any female survivor makes it imperative that they should hold their peace."

"What is he saying?" said Barbara.

"Nothing special, darling," said Nuria. "It's easier now: don't you feel better? We're in the channel."

An hour later the sea had eased somewhat. Two hours later, and Barry turned south, following the coast at a distance of about three miles offshore.

"There is Caprera," said Barry, pointing.

"Didn't they think that Mussolini had been taken here at one time, before he was rescued?" said Thornton.

"No . . . they thought he was on Maddalena, the island next door. You can pick it out against the cliffs if you look carefully. Here, take the glasses." Thornton looked. Maddalena was low-lying and covered by brown scrub. But there were too many islands, altogether too many: he was emotionally overdrawn, having spent his last pennies, and those of others besides, upon the Columbretes.

"That was a very sweet job, that one," said Barry. "I'd have liked to have been on it. Where is he now, that fellow Skorzeny?"

"In Madrid, I think," said Thornton.

"He was a good man. They jumped on a landing ground about three hundred yards square, didn't they? I read about it in his memoirs."

"Any damn fool can parachute nowadays," said Thornton. "You just fall out of a door. It was different when you had to jump through a hole, and mind your copping nose, as well."

"Don't talk like a crossbow-man denigrating gunpowder," said Barry. "You must make allowances for progress."

"There is no bloody progress. *You've* made some, perhaps, but you're about the only man I know who has."

"Unfortunately, I'm becoming increasingly interested by the commercial aspect of my activities," said Barry. He shouted aft for Corcoran. When the Irishman appeared he instructed him to haul down the Panamanian flag and to replace it by the Liberian emblem. "The Italians prefer something truly exotic," he said. "I never do get picked up, of course," he explained to Thornton, "but these innocent changes of routine help to keep the crew happy. I also change the ship's papers to suit the flag—rather a pretty one, incidentally, don't you find? The belief in the American Declaration of Independence must have been strong within negro breasts at the time."

"Barry," said Thornton. "How much is Aranjuez paying you?"

"What did you say, old boy?"

"You heard me quite clearly."

"Why . . . do you want to be paid, too, old boy? If you do I'm sure we can arrange something."

"No, I don't want to be paid."

"Consider yourself above it, do you, Desmond—or merely unserviceable?"

"I think I'll go and have my lunch," said Thornton.

"That's a good idea," said Barry. "There is a *couscous* to-day, too, in honour of our Islamic guests."

Among all the passengers aboard, Moulay Hassan was undoubtedly the most imperturbable. He had behaved admirably during the anxious moments of embarkation, with restrained decorum since. Of his two co-religionists, the secretary had for some hours now been prostrate, though unfortunately not speechless, with sea-sickness. Advised to go on deck, he now lay aft: his head upon a coil of rope; a bucket by his side. And between the bouts of retching, no longer westernised save for his soiled and crumpled suit, he chanted:

"*Ai . . . aiah . . . lelqi . . . leea . . . llhah.*" A short pause would follow; then the last phrase would be repeated several times with the utmost melancholy: "*Llhah . . . llhah.*"

"Cheer up, chum," Corcoran said to him. "You'll soon be standing on the burning sands of Africa."

But, kindly as was his disposition, Corcoran found it difficult to take more than a passing interest in this wretched, rather dirty man.

Corcoran's thoughts ran elsewhere. In charge of the dinghy the previous night, he had caught a glimpse of a face so piquant in its dusky beauty, and so obviously the prey of an extreme, marine-inspired trepidation, that the fires of lubricity had flared within his heart:

"God, what a lovely *bint*, skipper! We want to keep that for a mascot, don't we?"

"I'm very sorry, Corcoran, but I'm afraid you'll have to hold out until you get back to Mother Rosa's in Tangiers. You leave that girl alone."

"You got me all wrong, skipper. This is love. I never seen a *bint* like that before."

"If I have any trouble with you over that girl, Corcoran, you'll go overboard and your parish priest in Everton will get a letter to say you made a Christian death."

"I'm still the steward, ain't I?" said Corcoran. "I got to
([328]

serve the passengers' meals, and keep them happy, haven't I?"

"Well, don't put any Spanish fly in her *tortillas*," said Barry.

Alas! Though always ready with the providential tray of food, the cup of coffee, and the aspirin, Corcoran obtained but small success. His victim occupied the tiny cabin opposite to that of Nuria and Barbara, and had locked her door. In response to his repeated knocking, to his murmured words of hope and consolation, Corcoran obtained no more than the sight, from time to time, of a brown arm and of a clump of predatory fingers which whisked his offerings away into quarters from which it seemed that he must ever be excluded.

"I've brought some eau-de-Cologne, dear. A girl gets dirty on board a ship. How about a little wash-and-brush-up?"

No reply.

Instead, the immediate and implacable enmity of Barbara, who had viewed these repeated scenes with an increasing distaste.

"You don't love me any more."

"Yes, I do, Babby . . . sure, I love you. Here, have a sweet . . ."

"I don't want a sweet. It's sticky. It's been in your pocket."

"Not in mine, it hasn't. I took it out of Steenbergen's."

"Then you're just a dirty thief."

"Oh, Babby . . . how can you say such a thing to your pal?" Corcoran was deeply shocked and hurt.

"Can't you see she's decided that she doesn't like men any more?" said Nuria, who had listened to this conversation.

"Bloody good thing if men would decide sometime they didn't like women," muttered Corcoran as he walked disconsolately away. "Christ, sometimes, with all I put up with, I swear I wish I was queer."

By six o'clock in the evening they were clearing Sardinia, with Cagliari a smudge to starboard. The coast took colour, and was now a long brown spar, with clear sea ahead, and somewhere in the distant haze, Africa. Throughout the afternoon the weather had been foggy, although the sea itself retained no more of its matutinal violence than a sullen, queasy roll. During this time Thornton, who had nothing better to do than to offer glasses of lemonade from time to time to Moulay Hassan (whose superb impassivity impressed him), to Nuria, and to his daughter, spent those periods when he was not employed as

a kind of class^{ic} water-carrier, in the deck-house, reading—since there was no other literature available—the *Admiralty Guide*.

Thornton had^u been under the impression that he understood French about as well as it was possible for a foreigner to understand that language. He now discovered that this belief was invalid; and that his ignorance of technical naval terms, except for those with auxiliary and obstetene meanings, such as *bitte*, was almost absolute. He had not known, for example, until he examined the glossary of this admirable book that "low water mark" was, in good Toulonnais society, compulsorily translated by the word *etiage*; nor that *madrague*, a name which he had always associated with the only pleasant suburb of Marseille, signified also a tunny-net.

Upon more general matters, the *Admiralty Manual* adopted a sound and, in some of its more rotund periods, an almost Macaulayesque style: there was clarity, indeed, but there was also a certain Messianic touch, as, for instance, in the instructions concerning fog signals, which began as follows: "Sound is conveyed in a most capricious way through the Atmosphere. Apart from wind, large areas of silence have been found in different directions and at different distances from the signal station, even in some instances when in close proximity to it. The apparatus, moreover, for sounding the signal requires some time before it is ready to act. A fog often creeps imperceptibly towards the land, and is not observed by the people at a station until it is upon them; whereas a ship may have been for many hours in that fog, and be now approaching the land. In such a case, no signal can be made."

"Rather nice, don't you think?" said Thornton, as he showed this passage to Barry.

Barry glanced at it. "I never thought until to-day that you were the sort of chum who had to take comfort from the printed word," he said.

Thornton looked at him. "Why do you want the fisticuffs so much?" he said. "We never had a fight before, in all those years. You're the boss: who accepts it more than me? This is your boat, not mine; though, by Christ, I admit I didn't think I'd be made to feel it so much."

He looked at Barry once again. "What's wrong, Barry?" he

([330]

said. "It usually seems to be my fault, but in this job I really can't say I've done anything you didn't tell me."

"Stop being copping humble, will you?" said Barry.

"It's just an attitude I've learnt," said Thornton. "Actually, you know, you're better off when you think that everyone else is your superior. You really are. It's the last and most rewarding of surprises."

"Desmond . . ." said Barry.

"Yes?"

The town of Cagliari, Sardinia—why, is it, in fact, the capital of Sardinia—lay eight miles away, with bearing 360 degrees. "Let the angle between the ship's head and the object be x : let the time of the observation be noted. We must now suppose that the time is again taken when the angle between the ship's head and the object is $2x^\circ$. Then, if the course is made good, the distance of the ship from the object will be equal to the run (over the ground) in the interval. Hence, the ship's position can immediately be laid off as a bearing, and distance, from the object."

"Yes?" said Thornton. He looked at Barry.

"Do you want me to say something definite?" said Barry.

"No."

"You don't want me to say anything definite, or otherwise?"

"No, I don't think that I want you to say anything."

"There are firearms down below, you know," said Barry. "You can shoot me in the back any time that you like."

"I was thinking that I'd deal with you to-morrow morning," said Thornton, "and, generally speaking, from the front," he added.

"So just one of us lives?" said Barry.

"Yes. I think I can say that. I think that that seems the best solution, as they say."

"To-night will be quite a party. I'm glad you leave this other matter until afterwards. There are three hundred gendarmes on Galite Island. I don't think we'll get our three fellows away without damage."

"Your friend, Moulay Hassan . . . oh, I'm so sorry: I mean 'Mr. X . . .' doesn't appear to be very pleased with your extra trip," said Thornton.

"Don't start looking for ammunition, Desmond. It may never fire."

"Have you forgotten about to-morrow morning?" said Thornton.

"Oh, no . . . not in the least. Very far from it."

"It should be rather fascinating," said Thornton. "I mean to say . . . well, just watching your face to-night."

Shortly after five o'clock that afternoon, when the south coast of Sardinia lay already astern, Barry rang the bell for his lunch. This, brought forward to him on a tray, by Steenberg, consisted of tinned salmon, a salad, and a half bottle of hock, and while Barry ate, the Belgian took over the wheel.

"Send the Spaniard up to me now. I'd better have a chat with him," said Barry.

Presently Mariano appeared.

"Well, this is a rare pleasure," said Barry. "I don't seem to have seen anything of you for a long time."

"When there's no work to be done I sleep," said Mariano. "I don't like boats, anyway. I had a grandfather lost at sea."

"Where are you sleeping?" said Barry.

"In that German fellow's bunk. Tell me, is he weak in the head or something? He keeps talking to me about a man called Novalis. Who was this Novalis?"

"A German poet, I think," said Barry. "You mustn't mind Horst. He has literary inclinations."

"I wish he had an inclination to change his shirt more often," said Mariano. He looked at the chart on the desk: "Well, where are we now?"

"Here," said Barry. He stabbed with his dividers at a point on the course line.

"That doesn't mean anything to me," said Mariano contemptuously. He pointed: "What do all those figures mean?"

"They show the depth of water."

"And those letters underneath them?"

"They indicate the nature of the sea-bed. At the present moment we're in fourteen hundred fathoms, and the bottom is soft, grey mud."

"Carai! But who wants to know a thing like that?"

"It's the attention we give to just such small details which

distinguishes us sailors from you slipshod military men," said Barry. "Besides, if you were drowning you'd like to know what sort of material your corpse would lie in, wouldn't you?"

"I'm not like you," said Mariano. "I'm so wholesome and tasty I'd never reach the bottom. The fish would be going mad trying to get a mouthful as soon as I started to sink." He put his finger on the right-hand side of the chart.

"Ah, Sicily! Good people there, I've heard. Well, when do we get in?"

"About midnight."

"Are you sure these three men will understand your signal?"

"They ought to. They've been waiting for it long enough."

"How big is this place, Galite?"

"About two kilometres long, and one broad."

"And you say the gendarmes don't live with them? That seems damned queer to me."

"Not when you come to think of it. The island's more than ten miles off the coast, and there's never been an escape from it. The gendarmes live in barracks on top of the hill. They have a sentry on the jetty all night. No doubt that seems to them sufficient precaution. But we shan't be going anywhere near the jetty, of course."

"And where do the prisoners live, then?"

"They're not prisoners, my dear fellow. They're political exiles. The distinction is subtle but important because it means they're not guarded at night. They live in a villa quite close to the sea, as a matter of fact."

"Just the three of them?"

"Oh, God, no. I think there about thirty, altogether."

"That's nice, isn't it? And supposing some of the other twenty-seven want to come, too?"

Barry grinned. "I think we can trust our friends to keep the secret to themselves," he said. "If they've been indiscreet—well, that's their funeral but it's not going to be ours. If more than three turn up you'll just have to point out that space in the dinghy is limited."

Mariano was silent for a moment.

"I still say this job stinks," he said. "Anyway, I don't see why they give it to us. Haven't we done enough?"

"It's quite simple, really," said Barry. "They get two jobs

for the price of one, and they also annoy Moulay and puncture his conceit a bit, which as you can see for yourself is rather necessary. He'll be a different man to-morrow when the boat's loaded with Tunisian nationalists quite as important in their way as himself."

"Loaded is the word all right," said Mariano. "This boat's like the ark already: and they didn't select the animals properly, either."

"There's another thing, too," said Barry. "They know quite well we got Moulay away by boat. If we hadn't come this way—south instead of west—they'd have probably caught us yesterday morning with patrol chasers in the Gulf of Lions."

"Do they care all that much?"

"You bet they do. You should tune in to the French radio, sometime. They're really very rude, and they don't even take the trouble to conceal who they're being rude about."

Mariano looked at him reflectively. "In that case, won't there be an even bigger explosion to-morrow morning?" he said.

"Yes, very likely, but to-morrow morning is where we cease to worry. I used to wonder what you Spaniards did with your Navy between the civil wars. Now I know: two jolly little *destructoros* are coming out from Cartagena to rendezvous with me here." He pointed to a spot on the chart about forty miles off the Algerian coast, and opposite Bône.

"Well, that's what I call service," said Mariano, impressed. "And then what—Ceuta?"

"Yes, Ceuta . . . and there we say good-bye to Islam's White Hopes, and what happens to them after that leaves me completely indifferent."

Mariano was playing with a protractor, making it crackle. "Don't you ever get tired, hanging on to that wheel?" he said.

"Yes," said Barry. "Often."

"You like me to have a go, then?"

"I thought you didn't like the sea."

"I can spare it five minutes of my time."

"Go ahead, then."

Barry withdrew. Mariano gripped the spokes of the wheel gingerly at first, then with resolution. "Why, there's nothing in it," he said, "nothing at all."

"I never said there was," said Barry, but, unseen by Mariano,

his hand was moving towards the speed lever. Suddenly, the throb of the engines slackened, and the boat lost way.

Mariano looked round in alarm: "What's happened? I haven't touched a thing except this wheel. It's not me, is it?"

"I don't want to hurt your feelings," said Barry, "but boats are like animals . . . they know who they're dealing with at once."

"Is that so?" said Mariano, more than half convinced. Then he saw the speed lever, and Barry's hand, and he chuckled. "*Vaya, cuentista*," he said, and chuckled again. The incident, indeed, put him in excellent humour. "D'you mind if I turn the wheel this way and that a bit?" he said. "I'm beginning to like the feel of the thing."

"Well, you're so far off course already," said Barry, "that I don't suppose it makes much difference."

The events of the succeeding minutes awoke all on board, and brought Horst hurrying, white of face and short of breath, to the deck-house.

"What is gone wrong?" he said. "You have all of us disturbed. Is there some danger?"

"Only to the rudder," said Barry, and the German went away, grumbling.

Some minutes later, when Barry had resumed charge of the wheel, he said to Mariano, casually, and without turning his head: "By the way, Señor Thornton doesn't like me any more."

"Ah?" The Spaniard's voice was neutral.

"No . . . Señor Thornton doesn't like me any more."

There was a moment of silence.

"You want me to do something about that?" said Mariano.

"No. I just want you to make sure, while I'm busy with other things, that he doesn't do anything about it himself."

"I thought he looked as if his mouth was his main armament," said Mariano.

"Not always," said Barry.

"I'll keep an eye on it, then." Mariano took something from his hip pocket and laid it on the chart-desk: it was a gun. "I took that out of his blankets, anyway," he said. "Just in case, you know. I'm exclusive; that's my trouble. I don't like these things to be in everybody's hands."

"I wondered where it had gone," said Barry. "I was looking for it myself."

They looked at each other, and both of them grinned:

"This would be the result of your stay in Barcelona, I suppose?" said Mariano.

"Ah? What do you know about that?"

"You don't think you're the only person they tell things to, do you?" said Mariano. "I was warned in Paris, when I went to get the car, that something like this might happen." He waved his hand in jocular farewell. "Well, I think I'll go and get some more of that delicious sleep," he said.

But he took the gun with him.

"Do you feel better now, darling?" said Nuria.

"Oh yes, thank you," said Barbara politely. "Ever so much better." She watched the flustered sea race by. "But I'm worried about the maid," she said.

"The maid?" Nuria was puzzled.

"Yes, the maid we left in Barcelona. I'm afraid she'll steal things from the flat. Pepita was much more reliable. And Dominique might go back there and take things, too: she still has a key."

"I'm sure she wouldn't do that," said Nuria.

"Well, perhaps not," conceded Barbara. "She must have taken nearly everything she wants already." She was silent; then "Oh, look, there's a seagull!" she said excitedly. "It reminds me of my sister, Genny. I wonder why?"

"Perhaps because you want to be reminded," said Nuria. "Do you miss her very much?"

"Yes," said Barbara. She looked aft to where Thornton lay asleep upon a furred tarpaulin. "He's very tired, isn't he?" she said. "He's always like that when there are too many people. Do you know, we must have had twenty maids since I've been born. I don't know what he did before that: p'raps he didn't need a maid?"

"Can you remember them all . . . can you remember that Lola, in France?" asked Nuria.

"No, not much—but p'raps I will later. That's what happens, isn't it? People go on talking to you about these things, and then, when you're grown up, you think that you remember all about them."

"Yes," said Nuria. "That's what happens."

"I don't like all these people very much," said Barbara, "but I did enjoy it the other night when Paddy went to fetch them in that little boat. Daddy showed me a picture once in a paper. It was called *The Raft of the Medusa*, and it was by a man called . . . called . . ."

"Géricault," said Nuria.

"That's right. Well, they looked just like that. Even the fat ones looked famished." She herself looked intently at Nuria. "When I was at school in England," she said, "all the other girls used to laugh at my funny accent. It was funny, too, at first, because, since Dominique, we've always talked French at home." She paused to take breath. "The other girls thought I must know lots of things because I've been in so many places," she said. "But of course I didn't know anything at all, really. I think I must be very stupid. It's only last year that I learnt about Father Christmas."

"I don't think Father Christmas is terribly important," said Nuria.

"No, but Guy Fawkes is . . . and the Queen. Here we have saints, but in England they've only got Guy Fawkes and the Queen. I was taken by my uncle to watch her. All those people staring, and the women with tomato sandwiches. In England they don't rub in the tomato: they just put slices of it between the bits of bread, and of course it dribbles on their chins. The poor Queen . . . why can't people just send a telegram to say they love her? Surely that's much more polite than staring? If I was Queen I'm sure I'd throw a bomb at them. Those silly faces, all wanting to be Queens, or Duchesses. How stupid! The English are so peculiar. They're quite nice at home, but when they come abroad they're very curious. They don't know any foreign languages at all now. Daddy says they did, once, but it's gone out of fashion. He says he'll send me some time to Lancashire and Yorkshire, and Scotland, because that's where the really nice people still live. Am I talking too much?"

"No, my little darling," said Nuria. "You're not."

"It's p'raps because I never talked before . . . not like this, I mean. At the school we had a speech day. Oh, lots and lots of fathers came down; and you should have heard the other girls before it happened . . . you'd have thought it was the Stock

Exchange, or something. D'you know what the Stock Exchange is, Nuria?"

"Yes," said Nuria. "There is one in all big cities."

"Dominique once told me," said Barbara, "that when she went to England with Daddy she received a great shock. It was in Harrod's. She was trying to get into a lift when a man started pushing other women aside in order that she *could* get in. He was wearing a bowler hat, and one of those *ties*, and a dark suit, and a rolled umbrella. Dominique said it looked like a French funeral all over London. But, you know, they're not as funny as they think, nor as clever, and I'm sure that if Daddy *had* come to the speech day he'd have been a great success. The others are so *alike*, you see: they're frightened to say anything different from anybody else. And there was only cider cup to drink, anyway. I know, because I helped to mix it. . . . one glass of cider, four of lemonade, and they used parsley instead of borage . . ."

Rendre la lumière suppose d'ombre une morne moitié.

Moulay sat, impassive, in a folding chair, towards the stern: it was there that he found the motion least objectionable. To various observers, he presented various appearances . . . this feat of *trompe l'âme* being attributable to the colour of each spectator's separate thoughts. Thus, to Barry, glancing at him from time to time, the man's mind was clearly occupied with questions of political precedence implicit in the coming night's work; to Steenbergen the great Agitator appeared torpid because he had eaten three helpings of *couscous*; to Thornton his vacant gaze and the immobility of his features suggested meditation of a philosophical, perhaps even of a religious, nature; while Barbara, approaching him cautiously from time to time, was reminded by his cross-legged posture of an item in a set of lead figurines, comprising wicked Bedouins and noble French *méharistes*, which she had once been given by her father for Christmas.

In point of fact, Moulay's thoughts were engaged in two directions very different from those which the above mentioned persons supposed. He was thinking, firstly, that the inevitable confusion of the coming night's events would present him with an excellent opportunity to dispense with the services of his secretary, who had already become an encumbrance and who, if allowed to

set foot in Morocco, might well, if he chose to spread tales concerning certain small favours requested from the French Government during their joint captivity, become a dangerous encumbrance. To Moulay's practical mind it was obviously essential that his compatriots should continue to believe that his long martyrdom had been conducted upon the most rigorous and ascetic of lines: it would not do at all for them to know that coffee had been plentiful and that the roast kid of which they, like himself, were inordinately fond had been served no less than three times a week.

No poison being available—and examination of the ship's dispensary had revealed nothing save aspirin and a bottle of liquid cascara—Moulay had been forced, driven, to the conclusion that the best course of action must be to push the secretary overboard. The man could not swim, and though it was possible that, although weakened by sea-sickness, he might shout for some time, Moulay was confident that he himself could shout even more loudly.

The second, but not the secondary, problem confronting Moulay was of a much more delicate nature: he was in love, and this sentiment, which he had not previously experienced in more than fifty years spent in the zone of Capricorn, was now causing him acute emotional and mental discomfort.

Moulay had not been unduly impressed when the girl, Farida had offered to accompany him in his escape—that had been no more than her bounden duty; but three days had passed since then, and during those three days Moulay—in train, taxi, or lying expectant, upon wet pine needles in silent woods—had reflected much, and his reflections had surprised himself and certainly the crickets then surrounding him.

Naturally, it had occurred to this man's keen and well-ordered mind that such reflections, which were most unwelcome and disturbing when he had so many more important matters to consider, might be no more than the result of an entirely in habitual period of celibacy; but when, only an hour or two since determined to put this last theory to the test, he had knocked upon the young lady's door with a polite yet firm demand for a interview of a private nature—and had been, as firmly, but much less politely, refused—then Moulay had known that he must be in love, because he had felt neither anger nor resentment, but

instead a warm glow within his heart, an upsurge of pride identifiable as proprietary, akin to that of certain falconers whom he had observed in his youth. These falconers, well knowing that they must not feed their hawks upon the tidbits of their private table lest, overgorged, they lose their keenness for the hunt, did so none the less because the beautiful, destructive bird was dear to them.

However, although in love—an emotion so novel to him that he had not, as yet, obtained occasion to analyse and evaluate its consequences—Moulay was already quite determined that these should be both anodyne and to his own advantage. “Perhaps,” he thought, “perhaps that is why I *am* in love? I cannot judge exactly, not having experienced such sensations previously. Possibly, one does only love when one sees that this state of mind, which is far from rational, is useful to one’s plans for self-advancement or security? Certainly, I have observed such tendencies in women who declared that they loved me, but since I have always disposed of such women when I became tired of them (or even before, and this latter by prudence) to my cousins or friends, before these women grew tired of myself, I am not in a position to say how long love lasts, how suddenly or gradually it dies, nor even to give an opinion as to what sentiment takes its place between persons who remain mutually well disposed to one another. Urged to undertake that task by Monsieur André Marie, the Minister of Education, during the period of my captivity, and provided by him, personally, with the necessary books, I studied the great French philosophers . . . but I cannot remember that any among them, except possibly Montesquieu, have anything very important to say: I think Molière is probably far more to the point. Our Arab philosophers, of course, regard the whole question from another and, I am bound now in my present circumstances to say, a more narrow viewpoint . . . admirable in every respect, and conducive to masculine peace of mind and well-being, but hardly appropriate to my present problem which may,” at this point in his reflections, Moulay sighed, “which may be one of approaching old age.”

It was at this point that the German, Horst, sat down, uninvited, beside Moulay Hassan.

“I see you are thinking,” he said.

“I do not know what it is called,” said Moulay.

"To me, it is clear that you were thinking," said Horst.

Moulay considered the German for a moment. Perhaps this man, he thought, who was large and powerful might push the secretary into the water; thus saving much trouble and a personal expenditure of energy. But no! the man's face was sufficient proof to the contrary . . . with Europeans, one could tell these things instantly: the Irishman would do it, but the Irishman was too friendly with the captain.

"We are twelve aboard this boat now," said Horst.

"*I must have been twelve at the time,*" thought Moulay. He saw the scene now, but knew that he saw it quite falsely . . . as might somebody unacquainted with the period described, or even with the military arts, the account of a battle in a history book. Napoleon attacked with infantry on his left, and when these failed, with *Cuirassiers*. He feinted with his centre, and sent his right, unobserved, round the scutum of the hill. It was the pure half of a Cannæ manœuvre. Benedek fled. Did he fly in advance of his troops, with them, enduring their curses, or far behind, the last to leave? And where was Napoleon during all this time? . . . one had his declarations, designed for posterity before, and after, the battle, but what did he say in between, in the moments of powerless watching? What passed in the heart of that man, who must surely have endured more moments of suspense, of anguish, quick to be hidden, than than any other man? And what did Seragh-el-Din say when he drove the Crusaders from the plain of Hittin, above Galilee? Arab historians were even more reticent. Then reticent I, thought Moulay.

"Yes, we are twelve," said Horst. "Twelve aboard. The sailor's life is curious. From where does he receive his reputation, the sailor? . . . I mean, of course, his reputation for profligacy? He lives alone . . . alone. The creaking of a deck is his love song."

"Yes?" said Moulay politely. But he was not thinking of the sailor, nor of his situation: he was thinking of that afternoon, at about four o'clock, in the passage of the palace; forty-one years before. His father had sent for him, had given him a dagger contained in a scabbard set with moonstones. His father had said nothing in particular, but Moulay had known that the occasion, while appearing informal, was in fact most formal, and marked the advent and admission of his manhood. On returning to his

own quarters, through certain galleries, deserted at that somnolent hour of the day, he had encountered one of his many girl cousins, a child of no more than eleven years, but one who had been, and for some months, frequently the subject of his nocturnal speculations.

"What have you got there, Moulay? I like that. I want it. Give it to me." Her voice was already deep.

"No."

Then they had struggled. How had it happened? He could not now say. Somehow, the scabbard had fallen. He felt her knees between his own, her thighs against his, her small, alarming breasts against his breastless chest. There had been a room off the gallery where the governesses who taught them French worked, but he knew well that this room was empty at that hour and certainly . . . yes, certainly it had been his wish to take, to drag her there if necessary, but no more . . . no more than the soft violence to which his position entitled him.

But she held the dagger, held it aloft, and threatened him in play obscured by mounting rage. Then the blade scratched his chin. Then he seized and turned her wrist, and thrust. So often had he experimented, with other knives, upon pillows, that he felt no emotion to feel the knife sink so easily into her chest. There was no scandal. There were so many of those girl cousins. She was buried at night, beside the pet dogs, and at about ninety-day intervals she had been in his dreams ever since.

"I was about to ask you," said Horst politely. "Have you ever seen the opera"—with condescension he gave it the French title—"La Femme Sans Ombre, of Strauss? I have seen it many times. It is interesting. You see a fat woman running about the stage, shouting: behind her is a long piece of cloth which is supposed to be her shadow, and which is so constantly getting between her legs that you are sure that, by the law of averages alone, she must soon trip. There are many acts. If you leave your seat during them you will hear people talking about Freud. The music is boring. Then you go home, and you read the book, and you find it brilliant, and splendid."

"You are not often enthusiastic, I imagine?" said Moulay.

"No, very seldom."

Moulay considered the man, momentarily. These Germans, he thought: it is possible that they are misunderstood, but they never seem to win their wars, and when they think they are doing so

they are so unpleasant, like that Consul at La Jache who offered me alcohol during the war.

"We seem to be talking at cross-purposes," he said politely.

"That, too, is almost axiomatic in life . . . isn't it?" said Horst.

Just before night fell they passed across the bows of a British tramp pockmarked with rust and bound east, perhaps for Malta, or perhaps for Suez. A few minutes later, Barry ordered food to be served to all aboard.

"You make it all seem just like the war, don't you?" said Thornton. "Why don't you have kit inspection, too?"

"I trust we shall have no trouble with you to-night, Desmond."

"Oh, my dear fellow . . . one thing at a time. Besides, I adore the role of brilliant second."

And night fell; yellow, opal, grey, then black: there would be no moon, this was the dark lunar period of the month. The boat's bow wave was alive with phosphorescence. Small stays, stanchions, a dozen other fixtures, mute before, could now be heard creaking.

"How long have your prospective passengers been waiting for this party?" said Thornton.

"I don't know. About a month, I suppose. They receive mail, you know. It was probably quite easy for Aranjuez to inform them."

"Oh, I'm sure Aranjuez wouldn't stoop to anything so vulgar as a code word in a letter," said Thornton. "He probably arranged to have a message washed up in a bottle. So much more romantic."

He went below. His daughter and Nuria, each with a fork in hand, were sharing a tin of peaches. There were napkins round their necks, and juice upon their chins. They were laughing.

"You know, Desmond," said Nuria, "I hate to say it, but, considered as a father, you seem to be no more than a simple agent of transmission. Does charm always skip a generation in your family?"

"Her mother may have had something to do with it," he said, looking at Barbara. Then: "Couldn't I have a peach, too?"

"You can have the last one," said Barbara magnanimously, but

when she offered it to him, he turned away, pretending to be busy with a book, because his eyes were full of tears.

"Good God, what's that noise?" said Nuria suddenly.

They listened. Somebody was thumping on a bulkhead somewhere.

"It's probably Moulay Hassan rehearsing for his scene of outraged dignity," said Thornton. "I don't know where Barry intends to put these people when they come aboard, but I hope it won't be with their co-religionists, or fezzes will go flying."

"I don't like Barry," said Nuria. "I don't like him at all."

"No?" He looked at her, surprised. In the course of ten years he had encountered many opinions concerning Barry, but never before, with the single and justifiable exception of a hotel proprietor in Littlehampton in whose saloon bar Barry had deliberately broken three tear-gas capsules—never before, one of active and, to judge from the expression on Nuria's face, of such comminatory dislike.

"What Dominique began, he is finishing off very nicely," said Nuria.

"How do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean, Desmond." She looked at him. "If people had labels to carry about with them, yours would be entitled: *'The Man Who Never Made His Mind Up'*."

"Is this quite the moment for character analysis?" he said, and glanced, significantly, in the direction of the child.

"Oh, you needn't worry about *her*," said Nuria. "Barbara is becoming more of a little mother every day. Aren't you, *nená*?" She stroked the child's face.

"I don't want to be a real mother," said Barbara. "Never, I don't. I want to go on liking ice-cream better than cognac and lipstick."

At this moment Corcoran entered the cabin, bearing a tray.

"I made you some kedgeree, Babs," he said. "I saw Steenberg had the rice ready, so I pinched some, and I mixed two tins of scrumptious tunny with it. You want to eat this: it's hot and it's binding, or so they say." He turned to Nuria. "There's a plateful for you, too, lady, if you'd like it."

"I don't know that I want to be bound," said Nuria.

"You just try it," advised Corcoran. "It's as good as mother's apple pie; you take my word for it."

And he went away.

"Now that is what I call a really nice man," said Nuria. "I like a man who follows up his ideas until he succeeds. Corcoran has been trying to get into that Arab girl's cabin all the afternoon on one pretext or another."

"Don't let me stand in your way," said Thornton civilly. "Nor any small question of social distinctions, for that matter. You could have great fun teaching Paddy when to use fish-knives, and his nails are cleaner than mine."

"Are you angry with me?" she said, surprised.

"Yes."

"Well, it's a pity, because I was just about coming round to thinking I loved you."

"Why?"

"Ah, why indeed! If I knew that, I'd know it wasn't love."

Barbara had followed this exchange with such an intensity of expression that when, as she now did, she took first his hand and then Nuria's in her own, Thornton was assaulted by a horrible fear that his child was no longer his child but was about to behave like a horrible child in a horrible film.

He need not have alarmed himself, because what Barbara actually said was: "Poor Papa—" and "Papa," as he knew well, was a salutation employed only upon formal occasions—"Poor Papa! If you don't love yourself, I don't see how you can ever really love anybody else, can you . . . *can* you?"

"You will go far with this little girl," said Nuria.

"She'll go even further by herself," he said, "when the time comes."

"The only people he really loves are a few men, and Maruja," said Barbara. "And me, too . . . sometimes," she added.

"I knew she'd spoil it all by some bit of pertness," said Thornton.

"Of perspicacity, you mean, don't you?" said Nuria.

The sea sped by. The water sluiced across wet wood outside.

"No . . . pertness," he said. Then: "Your kedgerie is getting cold. I'm going on deck while you eat it."

"Is it all right for us to come on deck ourselves when the fun begins?" said Nuria.

"I don't know. I'll ask Barry. I don't suppose there'll be much to see, you know."

"Here you are, child—eat," said Nuria. She handed Barbara a

plate, and then took her own plate, nibbled kedgerree, said "Mmmm"; then, with her free hand, reached across the cabin to the folding table for an open atlas.

"D'you know, your child appals me . . .?" she said. "Not only does she think this is all some rather specially organised picnic, which is natural, but she hasn't the faintest idea where we are in terms of geography."

"Ah . . . is that so? Does it matter?"

"Well, it does improve one's story later, doesn't it. Look at me. When I was four, I presented a bouquet of flowers—orchids, they were, too—to our Queen, Victoria Eugénie, Alfonso's wife, in San Sebastian: I can't imagine why, but I suppose it was some intrigue of my father's. Now, that story, which has helped me a lot in life, would fall quite flat and nobody would believe it if I left out the essential phrase, *San Sebastian*, which makes it all seem plausible. What do they teach girls in these English convents, anyway?"

"I don't know," he said. "What did they teach you, Barbara, sweetheart?"

"Just to be a lady," said Barbara, her mouth full of kedgerree.

"I think you spoke too soon, didn't you about my daughter's character?" said Thornton to Nuria. And he went on deck with a pride the more fierce because the occasion for it had been trivial.

He entered the wheel-house. "Want any help?" he said to Barry.

"No, thank you."

"In the old days it was customary to have a little nip about this time."

"These don't happen to be the old days. However . . . Barry leant across the chart desk, opened a locker. He pointed to the bottle of Indian rum.

"I remember a night just like this in the *Ægean*," said Thornton, presently. "I was trying to get ten men and myself ashore on Amorgos, but the ground swell beat us. It beat us that time, and two other times as well, and when we finally got there we found that the six Germans in the garrison had gone away on a fishing trip."

"Do you think that night was really like this one?" said Barry.

"No, perhaps not. I was just making polite conversation."

"I think you ought to go back to England and join some reputable and, if possible, Conservative club," said Barry. "Then you could tell these exciting stories of yours every evening."

"I see you've removed my gun," said Thornton pleasantly.

"It's because I don't happen to have a strait-jacket with me on this trip, old man, and all the rope on board is needed for strictly nautical purposes."

"Well, never mind. I'm sure it won't prevent us having a serious talk to-morrow morning."

"I look forward to it eagerly, Desmond."

"What a dirty bastard you are, aren't you?"

"Better to be dirty than pathetic, old man. Besides, dirty bastards are useful to society. The company they keep helps people to identify other dirty bastards: hitherto travelling incognito."

"This rum is rather good with lemonade," said Thornton. "Won't you try some?"

"No, I'm on benzedrine. I don't need your rum. You don't imagine I maintain this alert and watchful air from untapped reserves of character, do you?"

"This swell doesn't make your job any easier, does it?" said Thornton, presently. "What's this beach like?"

"Like all beaches: it's having just the wrong weather the day we call. But Paddy knows how to handle that dinghy, and the depth is good, right close inshore. You needn't worry."

"It doesn't mean anything to you, does it," said Thornton, "to see a place once, knowing well you'll never see it again? You have no regrets, not even a little, transient pang. Not even that."

Barry looked at him. "That allegory was a bit laboured, wasn't it?" he said. "You want to be careful, Desmond. When you get back to England and join that club I was talking about, you'll find yourself exposed to terrible dangers. There's sure to be a waiter with sciatica and a bedridden wife . . ."

"Did you say wife?"

"Yes, I said wife. I'll say it again if you like . . . 'wife'. You'll get so fond of this waiter and his domestic problems that you'll engage him in conversation every time he comes with a fresh round of drinks, and the hushed circle of people as bored as yourself who were listening to you won't like it at all. The spell will be broken, and they'll go away half an hour before they meant

to, leaving you to talk about sun-ray treatment with a man you're not interested in at all, really—except in so far as he gives you that small, emotional jog you need every twenty minutes or so throughout the day.”

“Good-bye, Barry,” said Thornton.

“Until the next time, Desmond.”

Thornton went forward. He looked at the sea. In his hand he held a glass of rum and lemonade, and one of the volumes of the *Life of Saint Teresa of Avila* which Barry had brought with him aboard. He put the book down on the deck: it was of no use to him. Thornton looked at the sea and he began to look also through the library inside his head in search of something useful, adapted to the times. He found it in Plato, the only philosopher whom he had ever been able to read with some degree of understanding.

Nothing can be more antagonistic than meanness to a soul which is ever longing for the whole of things, both divine and human.

Most true.

Can such a one account death fearful?

No, indeed.

Then the cowardly and mean nature has no part in true philosophy?

Certainly not.

There is another point which should be remarked.

What point?

No one will love that which gives him much pain, and in which, after much toil, he makes little progress.

Certainly not.

And again, if he is forgetful, and retains nothing of what he learns, will he not be an empty vessel?

That is certain.

Labouring in vain, he must end in hating himself and his fruitless occupations?

Yes.

Thornton drank his rum. He stared at the sea. For other people he thought, things end eventually—and then something else begins—but for me they never seem to end. Gloria is still with

me, but would I, had the circumstances been reversed, have caused the same ache to Glcra?

Certainly not.

But why don't they end, those things, for me? It is not, surely, as if I were unable to see, very clearly, what will happen? Another six months, and something will happen, and Dominique will want to come back to me.

Why so, sir?

All apologies, my dear, rumbled sea, but I am not Plato. I can only answer that the moth knows the candle, and the candle the moth, because both, contrary to all scientific opinion, are made, partially, of tallow.

"You'll catch cold, you will, standing there," said Corcoran, who was passing.

Wasn't it Bergson, thought Thornton, who said that an idea constructed piece by piece by the mind can only achieve life as an idea if the various pieces are capable of co-existence? He spoke of circles, too, if I remember. He said that, lying in bed with his eyes closed, he found no difficulty whatever in imagining white circles, black circles, copper circles, cardboard circles—but never, never square circles because the generative laws of circles excluded the possibility of describing that geometrical figure by straight lines.

"If you're so worried about my catching cold," he said, "you can bring me the rum from the deck-house."

"I've often been the way you feel to-night, myself," said Corcoran. "It's kind of soft and dreamy, isn't it? You wouldn't hurt a horse-fly, unless he bit you in the crutch."

He went away. Glancing back, Thornton saw Barry watching him through glass.

Bread is nice with honey. Bread is nice with cheese, or *sobrasada*, too; but bread is made from wheat, and honey's made by the long endeavour of industrious bees, and the principal ingredients of *sobrasada* are, respectively, portions of the pig, and the crushed dust of the sweet pimento; a vegetable to which I often bear a remarkable facial and colourative resemblance.

Now, why am I thinking of my father now? It's quite true that he won on the Lincoln that year with the tip I gave him, but why must the idea suddenly thrust itself across the small-scale map of Dominique and me which I happen to be studying? The answer is, of course, a slight but increasingly perceptible dislocation of the

mind, to which people who achieve it by simple manipulation of the emotions attach undue importance. We, here present with our Madras rum, know better.

"Thank you, Paddy."

"I brought the lemonade as well. I'd like a tot myself."

Thornton poured him out one.

"Did you ever hear that tale about the bird-in-hand?" said Corcoran. He sipped.

"No, I don't think I ever did. What is it . . . a limerick?"

"Naah, man, it's one of those proverbs, you know, like 'Look before you leap'. This bird in the geezer's hand was worth the other two in the bush. Don't you remember?"

"Oh yes," said Thornton. "But they never say what kind of bird it was, nor even if the bush was prickly, do they? After you with the glass, please."

"That's a fine girl you have below decks," said Corcoran as he wiped his mouth.

"Ah, yes? To which one are you referring?"

"I was thinking of the pair of them," said Corcoran.

"He was thinking of the pair of them". How pleasant it must be to possess that faculty, to be able to think like that, in terms of that kind, like Corcoran. Oh, please don't imagine, dearest and most inscrutable of seas, that I am being superior. Such an attitude would as ill become me as it would behove you to deny that you obtain more than half the waters which compose you from the Atlantic and that, finally, only a somewhat greater concentration of salt distinguishes you, oceanographically speaking, from the Caribbean or the Great Australian Bight.

What was that other thing that Bergson said? Of course, I know: he is terribly *démodé* now, but since we live on a fragment of a fragment of a fragment of space, and neither know nor can know any of the more empirical of answers, I feel sure, with his greater feeling for the trivial tragedy of Humanity, that he suits my purpose quite as well as Karl Barth or Heidegger.

I can see you in ten years' time, Dommy. I can't see you so well in twenty years' time, but I think I have an idea of the form. How is the legend growing by the way? I imagine there must remain a few rough edges, as yet, but don't worry: practice and experience, with moist hand in hand, will plane your surface smooth. "I started badly," I can hear you saying, "and I went on worse."

That's my cue to come in, isn't it, dressed up as Attila? But I have no right to talk . . . now and then, not always, but now and then, I've said much worse things about you—for example, to Nuria—than you will ever say about me. The reason is, of course, that I'm a little bit your plague and black death, darling, but also, and increasingly, your reserve conversational weapon . . . whereas, to me, you are . . . you are . . .

"Oh God, to hell with it," he thought. Away, away! What can I do better than to disappear?

"You seem a little unsteady on your feet, Desmond," said Barry, opening the deck-house window. "I warn you, those stanchions won't stand the butting of your stomach indefinitely, and if you fall in the drink you'd do well to fall remembering that we haven't practised life-saving, or even man-overboard drill, on this boat for quite a long time now."

The French Hotchkiss 9 mm. machine-gun is a reliable weapon, which has become obsolete only because it is far too heavy. The two component parts of this weapon, tripod and gun proper, weigh, when assembled, no less than fifty-six kilograms. For this reason the Hotchkiss machine-gun is not now much employed by the French Army, except in fixed positions, with a fixed field of fire.

Who can control the movements of human beings, who can predict their fantasies, who can prevent, delay, annul their interference in matters which are no concern of theirs and the results of which they will afterwards attribute to a tawdry lottery chance which they call fate?

Sergent-Chef Peretti, of the French *Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*, was smoking an after-dinner *Voltigeur* at eleven-thirty that night, in the company of Caporal-Chef L'Estaing, of the same force, on the reception quay of Galite Island, not three hundred yards distant from the point of embarkation, and less than ten from the fixed emplacement of the Hotchkiss, when he perceived a boat entering the shallow bay, hovering, hovering, for several minutes, then swinging outboard a dinghy.

Sergent-Chef Peretti, despite much excited advice—at first of a bloodthirsty nature, but later increasingly prudent in tone—from his subordinate colleague, L'Estaing, made no aggressive move of

any kind until he had seen three white-clad figures embark from the shore, in the dinghy, fumbling for the thwarts.

Even then he waited, and he waited because he was a Corsican, because violence was, to him, of no importance, unless it could be achieved with a certain artistic effect.

He sat down, comfortably, on the steel bicycle seat behind the Hotchkiss, and from that seat he opened fire—possessed of this temporal advantage: that every tenth round was a tracer; a fact which aided him considerably in effecting his purpose, because, except with a pistol, and in free aim, he was otherwise an indifferent shot.

At the first burst, the three white-clad figures left the dinghy, jumping into the water. Sergeant-Chef Peretti paid no further attention to them, because he knew that these men could not swim and must therefore drown. Instead, he fired at the dinghy, with its sole occupant, the sculler; but the sculler in this dinghy, though clearly quite unprepared to pick up the drowning Arabs, did not seem, otherwise, to have lost his head, and, indeed, could be seen even now sculling vigorously; sculling towards a patch of mist beneath the cliff, through which patch he no doubt hoped to pass on his way back to the blind side of the waiting boat.

Caporal-Chef L'Estaing, who was young in the service, a ginger Norman from Carteret, neither wished nor found it desirable to give controversial advice to his chief. These were the first rounds of ammunition which he had ever seen fired—except those fired upon the firing-range.

Perfectly aware of his subordinate's tacit approval, Sergeant-Chef Peretti, having lost sight of the dinghy in the *brume*, turned his attention to the waiting boat, and he raked it from its foremost wooden, painted splinter to the flat surface of its cutaway stern.

It was with some of the one hundred and thirty-seven rounds of ammunition which he expended in this way that he fractured a half-empty bottle of rum, lying askew upon the deck, killed a small girl, and seriously wounded a woman: both of whom had come up topboard to watch the progress of events.

It is not possible to know what Sergeant-Chef Peretti would have replied, had he been informed that he had murdered, in the strict line of duty, of course, a small English girl aged nine years and six months and three days. The French Ministry of the Interior were, some other days later, at something of a loss as to how they might

or should reward Sergent-Chef Peretti for the presence of mind and the initiative which he had shown upon this memorable occasion. Peretti already held the *Médaille Militaire*, having won, that sometimes admirable, but more often ubiquitous, decoration at the end of the four years which he had spent in Sidi-bel-Abbes, instructing German members of the Foreign Legion in field tactics, with which they were perfectly cognisant by instinct. It was decided to make him a Chevalier of the *Légion d'Honneur*. Nobody will ever know who, exactly, promoted that excessive proposition, because the Government fell no more than two days later. The next Government despatched Sergent-Chef Peretti to Dahomey. They sent with him the Norman, L'Estaing.

Of the bullets which killed Barbara, both were fatal wounds: the first struck her in the neck, the other just a line of lace above the heart. She was dead when her father arrived, dead among the slivers of the broken rum bottle at her feet, and there was rum upon her dead but still moving ankles, dancing to the beat of an engine running full ahead.

Somebody, wet and dripping, climbed aboard just about that time. No doubt it was Corcoran, come to mobile surety at the last moment. There was another splash, too, well astern, but nobody paid much attention to that.

"Desmond . . . Desmond." Suddenly Thornton found them all round him: Barry, Steenberg, Corcoran; Horst alone was absent, no doubt at the wheel . . . Horst, and the three Arabs.

"They don't fire any more," said Steenberg, "because they can't. They've no more ammunition."

"Why didn't you pick those poor Tunisian bastards up?" said Thornton to Barry. "You could have done it. You know you could have done it."

"Desmond," said Barry. "What I feel, or what I can say . . . you won't listen to it. I swear I mean well, but if you go on much longer I'll have you taken below and locked in a cabin. Do as I say, for Christ's sake. Sit down by your child."

"Why should I sit down by my child? Won't I feel it enough to-morrow morning, and for the rest of my life? I'm mad now, can't you see . . . quite exceptionally and irresponsibly mad. I don't even want to kill you any more, Barry. Oh, God, Barbara . . . Barbara . . . oh, God and Christ, was I as bad as *that*?"

"Lie down beside her, then . . . lie down beside her, you god-

damned fool . . . you goddamned fool. Lie down beside her," said Barry.

"Señor Thornton does not mention at all the wounded lady," said Horst.

"Pack it in, will you, Horst?" said Barry. "And now I come to think of it, keep out of my sight until to-morrow morning, except when you're dealing with Nuria. And that goes for you, too, Paddy."

A small, dead child. . . a small, dead child. When you lie down on the hard wood beside that dead child, the wood won't move . . . no, the wood won't move, nor will the infulfilment of the child's flat chest . . . oh, Christ, the breasts she never will have now. Oh, darling, darling; you were Gloria for me, and I never even told you so."

"And you?" he said to Nuria.

"Can't you see that she's unconscious," said Steenberg.

"Where is it, then?" said Thornton.

"You can see the mark. It's just below her ribs."

"In that case, she must be conscious. Are you conscious, Nuria?"

"Just a little bit, Desmond, but not for you. Tell them to take the cotton wool away and bring some morphia, will you? When will those destroyers meet us?"

Thornton looked at her for a moment: the face of shock is white. Then he lay down between her and his child, and, turning on his right side, took Barbara's dead hands in his own, and kissed them.

"Does that change anything?" said Nuria, with an infinite and syllabic slowness in her voice. She was looking at his back.

He turned. "No, nothing," he said. "Nothing at all. But her I can tough, and you I can't."

"Corcoran!" said Barry, simultaneously.

"Yes, Skipper?"

"Come over here a moment."

"Certainly, Skipper."

"We shall need one small length of sail cloth, and one large length, for to-morrow morning. Also, the two national flags—Spanish and English. I also understand that Horst has the barbiturate habit. Bring me everything he has, and about a pint of coffee, too."

"If you think you can keep Thornton quiet now with that schoolboy stuff, you're making the biggest mistake of your life," said Corcoran. "Look at him . . . just look at him."

"That's all right, Paddy. You stick to the Second division, but don't start playing around in the First."

He looked down at the group upon the deck. "The little kid," he said, "the little kid. But mine's the only way to treat it, Paddy. Try and realise that . . ."

Seventeen

"AH, GOOD MORNING, Señor Thornton." This was Manolo, the porter of the block of flats. He came forward, smiling. He had, apparently, just shaved.

"Are there any letters for me?" said Thornton.

"No, not many letters, but several people have called."

"Who?"

"Some of them left notes for you. Let me see, there was that English lady, Señora Share, and Señor Fife—he came twice, and then another gentleman—he came twice, too, but wouldn't give his name."

"What kind of gentleman?"

"A Spaniard. Very well dressed. About forty." Manolo led the way down a short flight of steps towards his kitchen. He handed Thornton his correspondence. "Would you like my wife to come up and clean the flat for you?"

"No, that's all right, thank you. I'm not staying very long." A thought occurred to him. "By the way, how do I stand for my rent?" he said.

"You owe two months, Señor Thornton."

"Right; well, here's enough for three. You can send the receipt up to me when you get it."

"Very good, Señor Thornton." They were now beside the lift. Manolo placed Thornton's grip inside. "How's your little girl?" he said.

"She's on holiday," said Thornton. He closed the double doors. The lift rose.

The flat was in 'darkness, and smelt of radiator paint. He hoisted the Persian blinds in the living-room, and looked out at the familiar view of Tibidabo. The hills seemed greener now, and beneath the Observatory their coat was speckled. Wild flowers, probably: this was the season for wild flowers. Across the street, on a balcony, a young woman in a dressing-gown was watering flower-pots. He had often watched this young woman doing this, and as often she had known that he was watching her. Now, as soon as she observed him staring, she put down her watering-can and disappeared from view: no doubt in order to inform her relatives that the curious foreigner across the way was back. In the taxi-rank beneath, Thornton recognised a face well known to him.

Still heising blinds, Thornton proceeded farther through the flat. Outside his daughter's room, he paused. Fortunately, the key lay in the outside of the door, so that there was no need to enter. He locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

Still farther down the passage, he halted at the clothes cupboard—it was almost a small room, really—a room which he used in preference to wardrobes. With the exception of two of his oldest suits, the clothes cupboard was empty. Every single one of his daughter's summer dresses had gone, her overcoat, his own, and much else besides. He turned to the linen cupboard: nothing remained here save a towel and a pair of sheets. On the shelf above he discovered a shirt and some of his ties. He wondered whether these omissions had been the result of kind-heartedness, or whether they represented only the fact that a suitcase had reached bursting point.

Thornton opened his grip in the hall. He took out his shaving kit, and went into the bathroom. He looked at his face in the mirror. He had not seen his reflection in this mirror for more than thirty days. He could see no particular difference in his face, except in the eyes. He turned the faucet of a tap: there was a gurgle, the sound as of a man choking, then silence. Somebody, probably Manolo, had cut the water off at the control cock. Yes, it was certainly Manolo, acting from prudence, and in remembrance of catastrophe the previous summer when he, Thornton, had come here from Calafell for an hour or two to bathe and change his clothes—and during that time, as often was the case in Barcelona in the summer, the water had been cut off by the

company for several hours—but Thornton, forgetting this, had left a tap open, so that when the water returned, it had filled first the basin, then the bathroom, then the various passages, and finally the entire flat to a depth of four inches. While plumbers and key-smiths hammered at the unyielding door and the lift-shaft had been transformed into a kind of wet and dripping grotto, it had been necessary to call upon Dominique to pacify the tenant on the floor beneath, which person had declared to her, with the almost Prussian power of voice which distinguishes the rarely furibond Catalan, that if people were not sufficiently civilised to understand the use and purpose of certain modern gadgets, then they should refrain from renting apartments occupied, in general, by persons of good family and education.

To which indictment Dominique had replied: firstly, and in order to establish the essential feminine advantage, that she was quite unaccustomed to prolonged monologues delivered in that tone of voice; and, secondly, that in the matter of relative civilisation, the man might do well to examine the pretensions of his wife, who, although one could not help knowing that, at an age well above forty, she had courageously undertaken to learn to play the piano, one had none the less hoped would make rather more rapid progress than the single performance of *Barcarole* repeated all day, and in the evening, too, when children were vainly endeavouring to cajole a too necessary sleep.

Thornton rang the porter's bell on the landing. Presently Manolo arrived. He was accompanied by his wife, carrying scrubbing brush, wet rag and bucket.

"Manolo, I can't find the water-cock. Turn it on for me, will you?"

"But it's just outside here, Señor Thornton. I thought you knew." He leant out of the window of the second lavatory, and twisted.

"I'm sorry to have brought you up."

"That's all right, Señor Thornton. I brought my wife, too. Please let her clean the flat. She wants to, and it needs it."

"All right. Just as you like." It brought him near to tears again: the realisation that these people were fond of him. He went into the kitchen and drank a glass of water. When he returned, he said: "The dining-room seems worst. Perhaps she'd better start there." He looked at Manolo's wife. He had always liked

her. She came from Burgos, which is about as good a place as anybody could come from if you have to *look* your deficiencies. She had freckles with dark hair; which is another of the many ways in which Spaniards are unique, eugenically speaking. Also, she had a step-child, almost a young man now, Manolo's son by a former, dead wife; and she was kind to this young man. Suddenly Thornton realised that, although these people must have been watching his own household closely for many months, he had never himself made any other than superficial enquiry about theirs.

"Now, you're here: look at this," he said to Manolo; showing him the empty clothes cupboard, and the empty linen drawers.

"Oh, Señor Thornton: I can't believe it."

"How many times did that *chica* go out with a bag?"

"Only once that I saw. It was then she left me the key."

"Then it must have been a very big suitcase."

"We will trace her, Señor Thornton. It is my responsibility. I will trace her myself."

"I'm sorry, but that's just what I want to avoid. Let her alone. As a matter of fact, she's done me a favour."

"It is not possible now to let her alone, Señor Thornton. She must be found. The fault is mine. I have my duty to the owners of this building."

"That's all nonsense, Manolo. You're getting excited about nothing. I shall never say anything to the owners. You can count upon that."

"But what must you think of me, Señor Thornton? I should have stopped her and asked her to open the suitcase."

"Would you have enjoyed doing that?"

"No, Señor Thornton, I can't say that I would have."

"Nor would I have enjoyed thinking you were doing so. Come over here," he said, "if you really want to do something for me, there's a telegram I'd like you to send. I haven't time to send it myself. Will you do that for me?"

"Certainly, Señor Thornton."

From a drawer Thornton took a telegraph form. There was some delay while he searched for pen and ink. When he had found them, he wrote. He handed the result to Manolo while Manolo's wife, indifferent to the conversation three feet above her head, swept with wet, spitting swab around his cringing feet.

"But this is in French, Señor Thornton."

"Well, I dare say you can copy it, can't you? Please don't send it direct, but E.L.T. The delay will be very useful to me."

"Very well, Señor Thornton."

"Would you like some coffee?" said Thornton to Manolo's wife, when her husband had gone. "There is also a tin of sardines."

"I should like some coffee," she said, "but not the sardines."

She did not lift her head.

He put the water on to boil for the coffee. Then he shaved, and took a cold douche. He had just finished these private arrangements designed to improve his exterior appearance, when the telephone rang several times with urgent decibel volume.

"Yes?" he said.

"This is Maruja."

"Ah? How did you know I was back?"

"We didn't know you were back. Either Luis or I telephone every day at this time."

"Then you can tell me what time it is. All the clocks here are in a state of active dissidence."

"It is a quarter-past ten," said Maruja.

"I'll come and see you before you close at one," said Thornton.

"You will?"

"Let's say, I'll try to."

He put down the receiver. When he came back into the sitting-room with the coffee for Manolo's wife, she looked up at him.

"May I sit on the sofa to drink this?" she said.

"Please don't be stupid, Señora Llopart. If I had two sofas, you could sit on them both."

Manolo's wife drank her coffee. When she had finished, she looked at Thornton. "My husband forgot to tell you about someone else who had called—twice," she said.

"Who was that?"

"It was a Señora Beltran. She was very upset. I had to take her to the taxi. Her son is very ill, very ill indeed. He had expressed the wish to see you. His mother is old. She was trembling. It is a long way from where they live to here."

"When was this?"

"Two days ago, and the day before that."

"I will go there this afternoon." He was buttoning, pulling at his suit as he said this. Suddenly, he turned, and he looked at her:

"Is it really my fault . . ." He stopped talking suddenly and looked at her again, this time more closely.

"Perhaps only a little bit, Señor Thornton," she said. "Perhaps only a little bit," and she smiled at him in such a way that he was impelled to smile back at her, feeling lines set for days crack and turn upwards as his mouth broadened.

Five minutes later he was crossing the street below. He did not choose the first taxi in the rank, as custom demanded: he chose the third.

"Well, how are you?" he said. "Are you just haunting me, or has this suddenly become a good beat?"

"It's a little of both," said the taxi-driver. "It's a long time since we had a game of that snooker you taught me, but on the other hand I have just bought this cab. It belongs to me now, see? I'm serious, a serious worker, but I can't forget my past. I thought you might be back soon. What are you doing to-night? Shall we do it together?"

"Not before eleven," said Thornton.

"It never was before eleven, man." He looked at Thornton. "Get in," he said. "The sun on your face is doing you no good."

Thornton got in.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Aviación Británica, José Antonio."

The taxi-driver tipped down his flag, so that the fare would not be marked on the counter. "I'll take you the funny way round," he said. "Unless, of course, you're in a hurry?"

"No, I'm not in a hurry."

"In that case, we'll go as far as Pedralbes. Would you like that?"

"Yes, if you drive fast."

The taxi-driver went through the Plaza Molina against the policeman's outstretched hand; and, in spite of the whistle and the shouts, he never looked back: not even in his mirror.

"That suit you?" he said.

"Yes," said Thornton.

"Then climb through that window and sit beside me."

With some difficulty, Thornton did so.

"Your porter has made quite a habit of coming over to the rank and chatting to me while you've been away," said the taxi-driver.

"Oh yes. Has he?"

"He said he hoped, if you were going to hire another maid, you'd arrange to interview the candidates somewhere else, and not like last time, when the hall and the street were full of everything from whores to young ladies of good families who had struck bad times."

"He said that?"

"You didn't expect him to say it direct to you, did you? That's half your trouble: you expect people to say things to you that their situation prevents them from saying. Manolo was perfectly right. He warned you through me, and knew that I'd tell you. Anyway, where has it got you . . . telling the truth about others, when you forgot the truth about yourself?"

"Into this taxi, it seems," said Thornton.

At the Plaza Bonanova the taxi-driver, who had come hard up the slope of Muntaner, swerved to avoid a tram; then swerved again, this time to avoid a group of horsemen.

"Friend of yours on board one of those, isn't there?" said the taxi-driver.

"Let's say an acquaintance," said Thornton. He looked back, through the rear window, at the pale, undecided profile, and the small moustache, the wispy hair, the equestrian manners imitated from Saumur. "How did you know?" he said.

"You're not my only friend, *hombre*. I used to bring your wife up here, almost every night, to the *Picadero*."

"Is that so?"

"Also, one day, I took the young gentleman whom we've just seen from the *Picadero* to the doctor. I was told to wait. I waited three-quarters of an hour; plenty of time to read the doctor's plaque, and all about him. When the young gentleman came out, he was looking very pale, and asked to be taken home—a thing that doesn't often happen, so I'm told, with him."

"Why do you tell me this?" said Thornton. "I don't want to hear it . . . I don't want to hear it, do you understand?"

"I'm not telling you anything you didn't know, somehow, somewhere," said the taxi-driver. "Look!" he said suddenly, "there's a road down there to the left which gets us on the *Via Augusta*. It cuts the trip in half. You'd like that, wouldn't you? You don't want to brood too much before your next interview."

Thornton said nothing. The taxi-driver turned down to his left.

"Where's your bid?" he said.

"She's on holiday."

"Oh, is she? Now, that's a good idea of yours. Where?"

"At Elche, near Murcia," said Thornton.

Presently they drew up outside the offices of the British company.

"Good-bye, old friend," said the taxi-driver. "Don't worry. Take it all easy: that's the way that others take the blame." He paused, and looked at Thornton through the open window. "You'll be there to-night?" he said.

"I'll be on your rank at *las once en punto*," said Thornton.

He entered the offices of the British Aviation Company. The foyer was crowded with people about to embark by motor-bus for the airport. The three clerks were talking to customers. Thornton waited patiently for some minutes, but when the customers were succeeded by others, without regard for the elementary rights of precedence he went over to the glass door and knocked upon it.

"Come in."

He came in.

"Why, hullo, Thornton, where have you sprung from?" said Tyson. He rose, and extended his hand. He seemed genuinely pleased to see Thornton. Although the season was no further advanced than mid-April, Tyson was already attired in the dark gabardine of summer. He looked like a Bolivian colonel who was holding the airport until the insurgents arrived: but a colonel who was perhaps not quite sure who, exactly, would be the next president.

"Give me three guesses," he said.

"All right."

"You can't stand the pace of it all: you're sending your daughter back to that convent in England?"

"No. My daughter is on holiday."

"You've decided to cut your losses and to go back to England yourself, then?"

"What losses?"

"I heard about you and your wife, old man. I couldn't help hearing." Tyson lowered his voice. "I was very sorry to hear

that," he said. "Very sorry." He hesitated. "I saw your wife a few weeks ago when she came in here to book for Paris, with the baby. I didn't know quite what attitude to adopt, and I'm afraid I ended by being rather aloof . . . well, let's face it, rather rude."

"You needn't worry," said Thornton. "You are only one element in the great floating vote."

Tyson examined him benignly: "Well, what is it?" he said.

"I see you've just started a new service to Marseille," said Thornton. "I want to book on it to-morrow afternoon."

"Return ticket?"

"No, not for the present. Stop pumping me, Tyson."

"You wouldn't play me a filthy trick and come back by Air France, would you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"All right, then. It's five hundred and fifty *pesetas*. You can pay me here, and I'll give you a receipt, to save you trouble in the outer office. You can pick up the ticket to-morrow morning, or if you've got a really bad hangover I'll have it sent up to you."

Thornton paid. He folded the receipt carefully and placed it in his breast pocket. When, about an hour later, he would withdraw the pleated handkerchief, the only other object in that pocket, in order to mop his face, he would lose the receipt as he had lost, in similar circumstances, many other documents of an official nature.

"I don't want to be inquisitive," said Tyson, "but do you happen to have an exit visa? I should hate to see you attempting to fight your way on board. The other day, the airport police fractured an American's arm in a struggle of that kind. He'd quite forgotten he had booked to Palma and, for some reason or other, broke free from the queue and did his utmost to board the plane for Las Palmas."

"I took out an exit visa six weeks ago," said Thornton. "It's still valid."

"Well, that's all right, then," said Tyson. He continued to stare at Thornton amiably. Then: "Would you like a job?" he said.

"How do you mean?"

Tyson lit an export cigarette. "A job is what you need," he said. "A small change of atmosphere, too, perhaps. You have money, haven't you? . . . you told me so once. I could maybe

find you something in Lisbon. Nothing very grand, of course, but I don't suppose you'd mind that, would you, to begin with?"

Thornton felt the blood in his cheeks. "I didn't think I could blush any more, except in retrospect, but you've brought it off," he said. "No, I don't want a job, Tyson . . . but it's extremely nice of you to make the suggestion."

"I only made it because some of us still like you, Thornton."

"Is that so? You, and how many others?"

"You could say me, and maybe two more, widely scattered." For a moment Tyson continued to smile calmly: then suddenly he clicked his fingers. "I knew it," he said. "I knew I'd seen something that concerned you this morning. *Juanito!*" he shouted.

"What is it?" said Thornton.

"You'll see in a moment. Wait," replied Tyson. One of the clerks entered. "Juanito," he said, "bring me the passenger lists for to-day."

"Very good, Señor Tyson."

"Is it what I think it is?" said Thornton, after a long pause.

"I don't know," said Tyson. "Wait and see . . . wait and see, can't you?" He offered Thornton a cigarette, but Thornton refused. "I read these damned things every day as routine, just before I start on the newspapers," he said apologetically. "You must excuse me if I do my best not to take the names in."

The clerk returned. He placed two typewritten lists on the desk. Tyson ran a finger down the name column. "Yes," he said. "I thought I'd seen it." He raised his face and looked directly at Thornton. "Madame Thornton, accompanied by a child paying half fare, arrives at Muntadas airport to-day at 6.30 this evening, on the Paris plane," he said.

"Thank you for the information," said Thornton. He rose, extended his hand. Tyson took the hand. Wrists danced.

"It looks to me as if you have a busy day ahead of you," said Tyson, busily.

"I knew that the moment I got out of the wrong side of the train this morning," said Thornton. He was shifting about from foot to foot. He did not know how to take his leave of this man.

"Good-bye, and good luck to you in Marseille," said Tyson, determined to help him. Although he would, in no circumstances, have made mention of this fact to Thornton, Tyson had a rather

urgent report to write: a report which, since it was private, he must write himself, in longhand; an exercise which he particularly detested.

Outside, Thornton consulted the green and black cover of the cigarette packet of '*Ideales*', upon which, previous to seeing Tyson and while waiting for the clerks to attend to his business, he had written the names of the people whom he wished to see that day; knowing well that he might later forget his morning intentions.

The list is of interest, and it read as follows:

Beltran—alive or dead
Freddy Cherr
Fife
Luis and Maruja
Maruja alone.

He now added, at the bottom of his list, and with the aid of a post-office-type pen from the counter, the single word: "*Geneviève*". He looked at this word for some moments, and then, as slowly as he had written it, he crossed it out. That done, he stepped into the street, hailed a taxi, and asked to be driven to the British Consulate. And it was only in sinking back against the hard cushions that he realised that he made this voyage from one place to the other place at some other time, in some remote period, before.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the Spanish hall porter, when Thornton had begun to fill in his form (*Whom do you wish to see? . . . Upon what business?*). "I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Fife is away."

"You mean he's on holiday?"

"No, sir. He transferred to La Coruña last week, sir."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Well, never mind: I'll write to him. I didn't know he'd gone already."

And he turned to go.

"Excuse me, sir," said the porter, "but you're Mr. Thornton, aren't you?"

"I am."

The porter fumbled with a drawer abreast his midriff: "Mr. Fife left a letter for you, sir," he said, employing an Andalusian lisp to considerable advantage upon the English consonants. "He asked me to give it to you. He said you'd be sure to pass by here one day."

"He really said that?" said Thornton. He was interested.

"Yes, sir. He did, sir. Here is the letter, sir."

"Thank you, sir," said Thornton. He took the letter, and again turned to go, and had even walked two paces towards the outer door when fingers clutched his shoulder pad:

"Thornton! You here. I was just about to ring you."

It was the Vice-Consul, a serious, elderly, and pleasant man, under whom, if he had been able to preserve his ideas of outset, Thornton would have been glad to have served.

"Were you?" he said. "What can I do for you so urgently?"

"If you'd have done what I wanted you to do—from a purely official point of view, of course, mind you, Thornton; and no hard feelings—you'd have cut your throat some months ago." The Vice-Consul looked about him, observed that the porter was listening; then pointed to a glass-fronted door and a card upon its transversal woodwork on which were written the words: "Mr. Culpeper".

"Let's go in there," said the Vice-Consul. "The man's away."

"We never went away in my time," said Thornton. "Oh no, sir . . . we never, never didn't . . . sir."

The Vice-Consul looked at him obliquely. "Have you had many drinks this morning, Thornton?" he said.

"No," said Thornton. "That's the hell of it . . . it's a remedy which doesn't work any more. I'm sorry to appear plaintive about it, but it does make the day so long." He paused, and looked downwards-upwards at the Vice-Consul, from beneath his eyelashes. The Vice-Consul blushed. "I was told when I was about eighteen that that worked very well with women," said Thornton, "but I swear this is the first time I ever tried it on a Civil Servant."

"Thornton, where have you been?" said the Vice-Consul.

"Away."

"That's not good enough. Where have you been, Thornton? I want to know. Have you brought your child back with you, for example?"

"No," said Thornton. "She's on holiday." He looked at the waistcoat buttons of the Vice-Consul. "You were two years in Bangkok," he said. "Do you think opium could replace it, or must one eventually rely on will-power?" He stopped talking. Although there were many chairs about, both men were standing.

Thornton looked at the Vice-Consul. "I can see you are stuttering to say something," he said, "but before you say it, will you tell me whether you intend to say it in a private capacity, or as one of the official representatives of Her Majesty in this city?"

"In the latter," said the Vice-Consul.

"Go on, then."

"Thornton, I have been instructed by the Foreign Office to withdraw your passport."

"What does that mean, exactly?"

"It means, in effect, that you must return to England."

"I see."

There was silence for a moment:

"Thornton," said the Vice-Consul, "I am not responsible for this." He hesitated. "Nor is. . . ." He ceased talking.

"You mean Fife, don't you?" said Thornton. "Don't worry; it never occurred to me that either of you might be."

"Thornton," said the Vice-Consul, "I have local powers in this matter. I mean that authority has been delegated to me."

"That is always a pleasant experience."

"You won't be so facetious when you reach London Airport, you know, Thornton."

"No, I don't imagine so: all that fog," said Thornton. "So you are sending me by air, are you? Well, I must say I call that very liberal. Go on."

"If you are prepared to give me a true and honest account of your activities during the last six weeks, Thornton, I am empowered—if I believe what you say—to request that the order concerning you should be rescinded."

"If you'll excuse me saying so, that sounds considerably more like a bribe than a threat," said Thornton. "The answer, incidentally, is 'No'."

"In that case I must ask you to surrender your passport, upon receipt of which I will issue you with travel documents."

"You're going a bit fast, aren't you?" said Thornton. "And supposing I asked for Spanish protection?"

"D'you really think you'd obtain it?"

"No, most possibly not—but one can always try, can't one?" He leant against the plywood desk and faced the Vice-Consul. "All this might be described as the gilt on the gingerbread," he said. "And on the lily, too; if I may say so."

"I'm sorry, Thornton. I didn't catch your allusion."

"You wouldn't have been a Consul if you had: you'd have been in Whitehall, my dear fellow, interrogating aliens." Thornton blew his nose. He did this because he was not at all confident concerning the behaviour of his lips and chin, during the course of an enterprise which he must now undertake.

"I shall call upon you at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon, with my passport," he said.

"And what about your daughter?"

"Ah? Is my daughter also the object of an eviction order?"

"No, of course she isn't."

"Then perhaps you'd be kind enough to leave me some remnant of control over my private affairs?" He stood up from the desk. "I shall come here, when you open, at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon," he said.

"And why not to-day?"

"My dear fellow, I know this question hardly affects you apart from the chatter coming out of your mouth, but doesn't it occur to you that for me all this might be rather sudden . . . that I might have one or two things to settle up urgently—my flat, for instance, and so on?"

"Yes, of course . . . yes, of course it does," said the Vice-Consul. "Very well, let us say to-morrow afternoon: but please be there; let's have no mistake about it. The letter arrived this morning. It will not be very difficult for me to pretend that I didn't read it until this evening."

"Exactly," said Thornton. "You are now truly my benefactor." He turned, and walked towards the door, but the Vice-Consul came after him, grabbing at his elbow.

"Thornton," said the Vice-Consul, "I can't tell you how sorry I am, personally, about this. Are you quite sure you have nothing to say to me?"

"No," said Thornton. "I have nothing to say to you—and as for you're being sorry, I think I can promise you that you'll be even more sorry in two days' time."

He opened the door, but while doing so, his attention was attracted by the name affixed to the cross-panelling.

"Culpeper!" he said, "Culpeper? I knew it meant something to me, and I thought it was an ingredient of mustard at first, but now I remember. Didn't a gentleman of this name have his head

removed for consorting too publicly with Katharine Howard, wife of Henry the Eighth?" He continued to gaze at the card. "This is Fife's successor, I presume," he said.

"Yes," said the Vice-Consul. "It is."

"In that case, my dear Consul, I think you ought to look round and try to find a man named Smeaton to keep him company."

"Oh yes . . . why?"

"Because a lute player called Smeaton had his head chopped off for making love to an earlier wife of the same monarch: Anne Boleyn, unless I stand corrected. And besides, if you'll allow me to justify a generation in my historical anecdotes, it would make it all so much more Elizabethan, wouldn't it?"

When Thornton had gone, the Vice-Consul went into the inner office, where the filing cabinets and the senior members of his feminine staff were enclosed.

"Miss Drummond," he said. "May I ask you something?"

"If it's about the tea, sir, I refuse to take the blame. I was assured that it was orange Pekoe. Morning and afternoon, I serve everybody cups, and all I get are black looks. Those Spaniards are so dishonest: I couldn't tell that they were selling me nothing but a kind of brown dust."

"It is not about the tea," said the Vice-Consul patiently. "It's about Mr. Thornton. Is he registered with us?"

"Yes," said Miss Drummond, "he is." She spoke defensively. "I had to put him in the card-index last year when he sent his subscription to the Coronation garden party."

"Then take him out, and give it to me."

Miss Drummond did so.

The Vice-Consul tore the card into eight approximately equal pieces and he dropped these pieces in the waste-paper basket.

"Well, that's one good riddance, anyway," said Miss Drummond.

While Miss Drummond was saying this, Thornton, having successfully negotiated the various hazards of the Plaza Urquinaona, had reached safety, a taxi, upon its north face. He opened the taxi door, but before issuing instructions he consulted his now much crumpled cigarette packet.

"Copérnico dies-y-seis," he said, just as the taxi-driver was becoming tired of the morris dance of uncertainty which his customer was performing on the pavement.

They drove in silence. Until they hit the slope of Muntaner, the driver remained angry with Thornton, but after that, he was merely angry with his engine.

Going up in the lift, Thornton heard another lift coming down. He looked through the slots, saw the blond egg-head of Peter Cherr; a hand clutching papers and a bent, browless brow above.

"Notes upon the origin of the Chicago style in jazz, or the skeletal matter for a commentary upon the voluminous work of Mr. E. M. Forster," decided Thornton.

But hasn't this, too, happened before, he thought, as his own lift went up, and that of the cultured representative of the British people went down? And then he remembered: it must have been about the time of Barbara's arrival . . . yes, just about then. He had come here, probably between two drinks, in search of a third and a fourth, and a fifth, to be sipped, and then suddenly swallowed, in an atmosphere of tolerance, and he had seen this man going down, then, too, with papers in his hands, and the result had been a lecture on the Art of Charles Chaplin—fifty-five minutes in length—delivered to an audience of twenty-seven Spanish ladies, only three of whom understood English words of more than two syllables, and all of whom, with the exception of the lecturer's vapid mistress, were there for social reasons so invalid that one and all came near to meriting a life-saving medal for their temerity, and for the succour offered to a people who talked about what other people did.

And had it been then, or the next time, that, left alone, for a moment in the dining-room, he had seen, propped up against the mantelpiece, a sheet (Basildon Bond, of course: the very mark of the Gentile in Hampstead)—a sheet which read:

FREDDY:

I am tired of seeing dust underneath my bed.

I am tired of being obliged to eat my breakfast cold.

Where are my socks?

I do suggest that you might pull yours up!

Will you please explain to the two chicas that I am neither interested in noise, nor do I wish to hear any noise, particularly singing.

When I come back here, to rest, and to eat.

Abel's toe-nails are dirty. He is not to come in my bed, before I have had my morning tea."

When Thornton first saw that document he conceived that it must have been written as a joke. Only much later did he realise that it was merely one of many such *pronunciamentos*, all seriously and culturally intended.

"You poor c——," he had thought at the time. "Either one of my wives, and the rich embroidery, too, would have seen you in a chicken run within two months."

When he rang the bell, Thornton blew his nose, waited, snuffled, blew his nose again: but too dryly this time, so that it hurt.

"Hullo, Freddy," he said, when she opened the door.

"Ah, hullo! Come in, I was just eating the last mango, but I can still offer you the first fig. Somebody brought it up for us from Gibraltar, yesterday."

"Oh yes, did he? Did he bring you some coffee, some penicillin, and a custom-cleared car as well, marked 'G.B.Z.'?"

"Why do you always have to be nasty, Desmond!"

Freddy led the way into the dining-room. A sullen-faced maid was clearing away the breakfast things. Beneath the table the child, Abel, lying in wait for all palefaces, made passes at her legs with a rubber-headed tomahawk.

"Where's Barbara?" said Freddy.

But Thornton had bought a water-pistol against the eventuality of that remark. Now he handed it openly to the child. "She's on holiday," he said.

"Oh, *don't* give him that, Desmond," said Freddy, perceiving the water-pistol. "How infuriating you are. As if I hadn't enough to bear since he started a collection of cockroaches," and she took the weapon away from her son.

"I see you've had this room redecorated," said Thornton. "Rather a pretty colour . . . that yellow." And so it was, but Freddy's taste, which was excellent, had been fighting a losing battle for years with that of her husband. Peter Cherr had found his spiritual home in the Gothic *Barrio* of Barcelona, stones and gargoyles from which could be seen at various points in the room, and also on its walls. Fortunately, a secondary passion for Chinese screens, of which there were three in this room alone, to some extent muffled the immediate effect of the masonry.

"Yes, it's always like that," said Freddy. "I should have known. Every time I get one of our flats done up, we're told to move."

Thornton was surprised. "You're moving?" he said. "Where?"

"Peter's been transferred to Bangkok," said Freddy. "Of course, it had to come one day, and it might have been worse: it might have been Rangoon, or the Yemen." She sighed.

"But I thought the educated Siamese already knew English?"

"So he does. That's just the point. Now he is ripe for amateur productions of Galsworthy, and readings from T. S. Eliot."

Thornton considered the matter. In the garden of the place where Peter Cherr worked there stood an immense packing-case: so large, indeed—it was about twenty feet square—that many who had seen it had been persuaded that the organisation must recently have taken delivery, from America, of a couple of farm tractors, or of a single, large-size threshing machine.

This case, however, had never been employed for agronomic purposes, but was the property of the Cherr family, and, as such, had been used, over a period of years, to transfer their furniture between Cairo, Belgrade, Naples, and finally Barcelona. Many and varied were the labels and stamps upon this mastodon of the traveller's impedimenta, but the most striking feature of the case was undoubtedly the great white stencilled letters which proclaimed, in three European languages, on its side, the essential, and perhaps symbolical information:

"THIS SIDE 'UP".

"Are you taking your furniture?" said Thornton.

"Good God, no: we're selling it." Freddy looked at him for a moment, then she smiled: "Ah, you're thinking about the packing-case?" The packing-case was a long-standing joke among people who knew them, like the lovers whom Freddy took with every appearance of enthusiasm, only to ill-treat and discard; like her husband's Spanish; like the fact that, for five years, they had been unable to spend a peaceful evening at home together without, sooner or later, inviting a group of casuals to join them.

"We've sold the case, too," she said. "Somebody bought it to make a beach hut."

"Oh yes?" he said, "did they?"

Not a great deal of imagination was required to see the case,

one end uplifted, with much smoke and frying fish and spitting chips inside, on the beach at Castelldefels.

"Have some coffee, Desmond," she said. "It's cold, but it was hot once."

"Are you coming to the point at last?" he said.

"If you like," she said. Then: "Are you going away, too?" She looked at him.

"Yes," he answered.

"Where to?"

"To Marseille."

"But you've been there before, Desmond. You've lived there, by your conversation, for what seems like dozens of years. Don't be atavistic, dear."

"It's a higher call," he said.

"But you're not going to stay there the rest of your life, are you?"

He looked at her sardonically. "I wouldn't be at all surprised," he said.

Later, when he had taken his leave, when he was walking home crossing the Calle Balmés which Dominique had once asked him to regard as the 'frontier' between their two lives, passing, indeed, at a street intersection, within thirty yards of the house where she had lived, and before which a taxi would no doubt deposit her this very afternoon . . . later, when walking home, he thought about Freddy, and all the people like Freddy, the sad, nice, clever-clumsy, too tractable people who never grow old until, one rainy day, the realisation of their age, and of the wasted years, strikes them with the cataleptic power of a seizure.

"I'm out of your life, dear," he thought. "Out of your life. I stepped out of it while you were closing the door, and while we smiled at one another, but you'll remain in my life somewhere. The brain is a marvellous thing, a most intricate mechanism. In some lobe—I think that's what they call it, isn't it?—I shall keep your dossier, and in more than one of the prison nights I shall take it out, and think of parties which you gave, and your face when receiving bad news, and then I shall say to myself: 'She was a little like Gloria, not so intelligent but as infirm of purpose; almost as courageous, but more badly advised by her blood.'"

He stopped at the bar in the Calle Guillermo Tell, only a few yards from his flat; and of course that made a difference: within five minutes, he was watching serious men playing chess—the

Catalan passion—and, watching, he thought about Freddy somewhat differently, but not less exactly. It's like the Alsations, he thought, an unlovable people, but who is to say that they are not unlovable, and sly, because for centuries their border land has been disputed by Frank and Teuton? During the war, once, in Salonika, in a prison where he had lived for three weeks in daily expectation of death by shooting, Thornton had met many Alsations; they had, indeed, comprised the majority of his guards, and through the windows of his ground-floor cell, at night, he would slip them pieces of paper, in exchange for *raki* and cigarettes; pieces of paper which read:

"Pay to Erwin Schaeff . . . the sum of Ten Pounds. Desmond Thornton."

And, of perhaps eleven pieces of paper, all except two had been delivered safely at his bank in Falmouth within six months of the armistice, and he had often wondered whether the owners of the other two had been killed or had in a moment of absent-mindedness employed the paper for another purpose.

Yes, like Alsations were the Freddie's of the world, meaning harm towards none, and prepared to endure no harm themselves, retreating into their infractibility, their indifference and their egotism when they had wrecked a life or built up a party to a point where wives began insulting husbands, and husbands, with beady gaze fixed upon unattached women, mixed dregs of gin with rum.

He let himself into his flat, passed through the silent rooms, undressed, leaving a cone of rumpled clothes in the passage; then he danced beneath the cold aid of a shower. After this, he dried himself—mopped up the wet floor (in times of deep insecurity he was particular about such small things, whereas when things were going well, his ties, his shoes, his shirts would lie as for a jumble sale beneath a bed, a wardrobe). Clean now, a towel round his waist and his feet in sandals, he walked about the flat, engaged upon a Recent History lesson. That small spot of blood upon the ceiling, a bright red now from the dinge and take of time, had been drawn from the body of his daughter, Geneviève, by a mosquito which he had subsequently killed with a pleated towel thrown upwards—a difficult feat, this, for those insects, although slow-moving, are adroit and crafty and, as with the fly, the shifting pressure of oncoming air provides them with warning.

Along the white walls of that room, too, ran her pencil hedge of

scribbles, a constant source of litigious argument with landlords as to who should pay for each new coat of whitewash (paint being considered, by tacit agreement between the two parties, as out of the question). She would be taller now, of course—perhaps a whole centimetre more. And ten feet away, just outside in the passage, lay another pencil slash, her height last October, and above it, with an edition of *Ulysses* balanced on a fair head to make the line, another pencil slash . . . the height of Barbara . . . and above that, but not much above it . . . a black, wiggly line which meant Pepita . . . and above *that*, Dominique, and above all the *macedoine* of womankind, himself, with a corrugated and uncertain mark, because he had moved, of course; while they climbed on chairs, and smiled and talked at a level with his eyes; as if he had been a Samson, instead of a David who had never managed to get his sling properly into the firing position. And in the bathroom, between two tiles, lay a streak of crimson, just another of the nail varnishes which Dominique had tried, for four days, then abandoned; and in the kitchen, on the ceiling the round marks, about the size of the caps on beer bottles, indented craters in the soft plaster, which he had made one night with the top end of a bamboo broom when the Germans in the flat above—it had been their Walpurgis night after all and so they had been perfectly justified in making a certain amount of noise—had been for his taste, always puritan where the follies of others were concerned, a little too rowdy.

In the kitchen he found some sliced bread, hard as gypsum, a segment of *Mahon* cheese, upon which a blue mould had formed . . . a mould as firm, and as long, as the soft hair beside a woman's ear, and amid which northern and phosphorescent lights twinkled even now, in daytime, as they do with the bones of mackerel, thrown in the dustbin, at night. He was beginning to open a rusty tin of *pâté* when the door-bell rang. Hastily he put on his trousers, and the one shirt which had not been ironed, and opened the door, looking first through the spyhole and seeing upon the landing a grave, despondent face, the colour of olive oil, and a hand, monstrously enlarged by the infractionary proceedings of the peeper: this hand fingering a necktie.

"Yes?" he said, still under the impression that the man must be a lay brother from the hospital of San Juan-de-Dios, a refuge for the aged, in the wild part of the *Diagona*, to which he had once

rashly promised fifty *pesetas* every month, and since then they always came to collect it on the first at ten o'clock in the morning, a moment when he never seemed to have any money, so that he felt now the accumulated guilt of three unpaid months. But, nevertheless, he opened: because it was the time for opening those doors. "Yes?" he said, still tucking in his shirt, and aware, now, that he had forgotten to clean his toes.

"I wish to see you, señor," said the visitor.

"Well, you would hardly have rung this bell otherwise, would you?" said Thornton. Immediately and in spite of his trousers, which he was still endeavouring to fasten, he felt much more at his ease.

"There's a German upstairs," he said. "Are you sure you haven't mistaken the landing? I'm sure he is much more your type of person. He makes glue, under licence, I'm told."

And he looked at the man's *Corriente* little face—slack everywhere, except in such folds of flesh as where muscles had been developed, ready to tauten for photographs—with interest, because it was not very difficult to guess this man's identity.

"Come in," he said. "We can't talk here," and he led the way to the dim-lit living-room.

"Sit down," he said, well aware that, at this stage, he held the advantage.

"I have no wish to sit down in this flat," said his visitor.

"Very well: you must stand. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Where is my sister?"

"Your sister?"

"My sister, Nuria."

"She is in hospital at Cartagena."

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

"The clinic is called the Santa Eulalia. You can ring it up from here if you wish. I did so myself last night from Tarragona. They told me she was out of danger."

"Out of danger? What do you mean . . . what have you done to her?"

"Personally, nothing. It was some bullets."

"I don't understand," said the man, slowly.

"Yes, you do . . . or, at any rate, partially you do. For a fuller explanation you should apply to your friend, Señor Aranjuez, perhaps."

"I know no such person."

"You have a very short memory, then. Don't you remember the cocaine you put in the diplomatic bags? After all, it was Aranjuez who found it."

The man was silent for a moment. Then: "Why has my sister not got in touch with me herself?" he said.

"It would have been rather difficult, you know, since she was unconscious, on and off, for four days. Also, perhaps, she didn't want to."

"You are responsible for all this, of course," said the man.

"Oh no," said Thornton. "For a great many things perhaps, but not for that." He loosened, then rebuckled, his belt. "Don't you want to use the telephone?" he said. "There are two wounds and both are in the same lung. I find it rather surprising that you haven't asked me about them."

"I came here for another purpose," said the man.

"Ah, yes? And what was that?"

"I'm going to have you run out of Spain within forty-eight hours, to begin with."

"That's amusing," said Thornton. "You can't imagine how amusing that remark is."

"You won't find it so amusing when you're escorted to the frontier. Let me add that if your whore of a wife comes here again, I can arrange for her to be run out, too."

"Say that again."

"You heard me quite well. 'Whore' was the word I used."

Thornton unbuckled his belt again and let fly with it. The buckle caught the man between the eyes, on the bridge of the nose, and, as he fell back, Thornton hit him in the throat. Then he seized the man's head and walked him towards the window.

"I'm going to give you a little time for reflection while I dress," he said, "and this seems as good a place as any." He retained a hold upon his opponent's head with one hand: with the other he reached for the cord, raising the Persian blind about a foot; then, having thrust the man's head through the gap, he released the cord until the last slot of the blind reposed firmly on the man's neck.

"I don't want to be more barbarous than absolutely necessary," he said, "so I'm going to bring a footstool and put it beside you. Then you can kneel on it, if you like, and that'll take some of the strain away."

He did this, placing the footstool beside the man's legs, but the man made no movement, except with his mouth.

"You will pay for this," he said, and his voice came, muted, from behind the blind.

"Then why don't you make me pay at once?" said Thornton. "Shout down at the street, and tell people what's happened to you."

The man made no reply.

"But, of course, you ~~da~~fen't," said Thornton. "It would be so undignified, wouldn't it, and everybody you know would get to hear." He examined his victim. "Of course, what you really need is what I used to get at school . . . the cane," he said. "I suppose not many people have seen you with your backside so prominent, have they? I can assure you that you can count yourself lucky."

The man began to wriggle.

"Before I go and dress, we had better get this straight," said Thornton. "I have many things to do, and you don't happen to be one of them, so when I let you out of there, you're going to go away quickly, do you understand?"

The man made no reply.

"Well, have it your own cramped way," said Thornton.

He went through into the bedroom and finished dressing. When he was done, he looked for a pair of shoes in the cupboard. So many pairs of shoes there were; some from as far back as 1946, when he had been at the Consulate in Nantes. One pair in particular, which he discovered now, he had never been able to wear at all because they were so big; immense golfing shoes, with pocked leather flaps: there was a *botellito* containing cognac inside one of them, dating, no doubt, from the period when Dominique had warned Pepita not to let him in again with a bottle, and to touch his hip pocket; his favourite place. He drank some of the brandy from this bottle. It tasted most unpleasant, particularly when washing down the *pâté* out of the rusty tin.

Then he went into the sitting-room, but before he did so he paused in the hall to look at the table in one corner. Now why was it so bare? Ah, yes, of course: the goldfish, there had been a bowl here, with its two inhabitants, named by Dominique in one of her rare moments of impersonal wit 'Malraux' and 'Mauriac'. But the bowl was now downstairs in Manolo's little sitting-room, as was, indeed, the charcoal drawing of a nude which had been

hung in such a way as to hide the mechanic horrors of the electric-light meter. That drawing had been given to Thornton by a New Zealand painter, temporarily in Barcelona; but Pepita had objected to it, saying:

"Señor Thornton, twice a month we have nuns call here, for the very small sums which you give to the poor. Do you wish these good women to see such a sight before their eyes while I am talking to them?"

"No, I suppose you're right, Pepita. I'll put it somewhere else. But it's a very good drawing, you know."

"That may be so . . . but nice women do not sit like that."

However, Pepita did not remove the drawing from its conspicuous site; nor did Thornton, who after a few hours had entirely forgotten the incident, not to remember it until, some days later, in another corner of the hall, he saw, inside a wooden frame which had previously contained a photograph of his parents, dead by bombwork in the war, the lithograph reproduction of a Murillo Virgin with her curly-headed child.

"What is this, Pepita?"

Pepita shook her shoulders so that her bosom danced: always the Spanish woman's challenge, and her warning of danger inherent in the next male-spoken word.

"I put it there," she said, her Andalusian accent more noticeable than usual, "because I hoped to . . . to . . ." she hesitated; then blushed behind her freckles.

"To counteract the influence of the other, perhaps?" suggested Thornton.

"Yes, Señor Thornton."

"Even the Virgin must have bared her breast sometime, you know, to suckle Jesus," said Thornton.

The two pictures had remained together many months, until Pepita's departure, in fact; but then she had taken away the Murillo Virgin (and the frame), and the nude, although roughly handled once a month by electricians come to read the meter, had somehow hung on alone until taken by Dominique.

Thornton was interested to observe that the man in the sitting-room was now kneeling on the footstool. He looked at the bent figure for a moment; then, remembering that he had forgotten something, he went into the kitchen to fetch that invaluable adjunct to serious conversation, the breadknife.

"Well," he said, "how are you?" He tugged at the cord of the Persian blind. Then he discovered, the body falling backwards, that the man was dead. He had certainly not been killed by the Persian blind, which had exerted no great pressure on his neck, merely retaining it in position. He had died from a surfeit of emotion and from outraged dignity, from a selection of ignoble sentiments allied, no doubt, to cardiac trouble of long standing.

Thornton examined the body. The impress of the blind upon the back of the neck was very visible, and, of course, would remain visible, even in an advanced stage of decomposition.

After considering the situation for some moments, Thornton took hold of the man's coat and tugged the body down the passage, through the hall, and into the clothes closet. The dead man's shoes rasped, swinging on the bare tiles, but he made no other sound. When he had propped the body against the wall, Thornton fetched a bottle of disinfectant and a roll of fly-paper from the kitchen. The disinfectant he poured over the dead man, and over the floor; and the fly-paper—having first locked the closet and placed the key in his pocket—he affixed to the interstices, so that no air should escape. He was, however, under no illusion concerning the efficacy of the fly-paper. In two weeks' time the stink would rise, overpowering; would invade the flat, the landing, then the floor above.

"It would be interesting to see whether they endeavoured to extradite him from France on this account, and what would be the French reaction to that demand. The situation was perhaps not unique, but it was certainly unusual; not many men, after all, could have been wanted by the police on capital charges in two adjacent countries.

"Shall I say you are here if anyone calls?" asked Manolo, as, downstairs, he passed the porter's office.

"I was never here," said Thornton. "You haven't even seen me."

They shot you in Spain, and they allowed you to buy small comforts from the prison canteen until the very last moment; whereas in France, once condemned, they put you in fetters, called for you to take your last walk, not at night, as here, but at an inconvenient hour of the morning, made you dress in your civilian attire, sign papers, and then cut off the collar of your shirt; no doubt in order that the guillotine should not spoil it.

Did they leave your tie for the blood to soak? A Spanish trial, of course, would be more diverting. It might even be possible to call the taxi-driver, and Tyson, to give evidence of character, and Manolo would undoubtedly be most impressive in the witness-box with that lisp and his yellow teeth. However, all this could be decided in an hour or two: the essential now was to gain time.

"That gentleman went out in a hurry, I expect?" said Thornton.

"I must have been next door, in the bar," said Manolo. "Why . . . what did he want?"

"Satisfaction, I think," said Thornton. "And he got it, too."

He went down the street, past Pascual's bar, past the old blind woman on the corner who was not blind and whose bandaged hand, although one might have presumed it to be immobilised by arthritis, never failed to clutch, and that eagerly, the saving coin, the dull-gleaming leaden *real*.

Ten minutes later he was sitting in a *Granja*, his elbows on a marble table top, a glass of milk, tintured slightly gules by almond essence, in front of him, and himself looking at Maruja, at the unsounded cavern of her eyes.

"D'you know," he was saying, "I've never been in one of these places before, although, God be my witness, you see one every seven paces here, just like a priest. Tell me, do they sell anything stronger than this?"

"Only Coca-Cola, Desmond."

"In that case, I think I'll stick by this brand of milk, but you, of course, must try one of those buns . . . I mean the ones in that glass case with the flies walking on the outside. One bun, please, and butter to match." He called the waitress.

Presently, while they were still looking, almost unblinking, at each other—the bun was served.

"Desmond," said Maruja, as she stirred her chocolate. "Desmond, where is Barbara? You behaved so curiously in the shop."

"Has the shop anything to do with it?"

"No, I suppose not. The shop has so little to do with anything these days, hasn't it? Where is she, Desmond?"

"On holiday," he said, and he sipped the yellow mixture.

"Where?" she said. "Where . . . Desmond?"

"In Valencia, with some friends of mine."

"With some people you knew when you were in the Consulate there?"

"That's right. The name is Guzman. They live in the Ronda de San Antonio."

"I don't believe they do, Desmond. I believe you're inventing it. I believe you've sent her back to that convent in England."

"Oh no," he said, and was about to repeat that simple and uncompromising statement; when suddenly, the world in front of him went black, and the last thing that he saw was his glass of almond-flavoured milk, spinning, spinning, like the helpless wood beneath a lathe.

"What's happened? What's wrong with him?" These exclamations represent a symposium of the objurgations and the impromptu advice uttered by the proprietor, a large, blonde woman with about ten days delay of peroxide to her hair roots, and by various clients, all serious men, as all men are serious when someone other is not.

"He's fainted," said Maruja. "You must have a private sitting-room, may I take him in there?" She was very efficient.

"Yes, if you wish."

There was a sofa in the sitting-room. They laid him down on this. The men then went away, but the woman lingered.

"Is he in some trouble?" she said.

"Yes," said Maruja.

"These foreigners are always in trouble. A devil, a stupid devil, seems to get into them when they come to Spain."

"That may be so," said Maruja. "Have you any smelling salts?"

"No, but I have something else," said the woman and, opening the laced, glass front of a piece of furniture intermediate in genus between wardrobe and sideboard, she brought out a bottle of *aguardiente* and a small glass.

"Don't let him stain his shirt-front, dear," she said. "Now I'll leave you." She snickered. False teeth moved. Then she went out, closing the door behind her.

Thornton heard this last sentence. He was conscious, staring at the ceiling.

"So it's come to this," he said. "Sometimes I used to think it never would."

Maruja brought up a chair. She sat down, her knees against his fallen arm. "Yes, you did," she said. "Oh yes, you did. You've been thinking of death the whole time I've known you, and more and more as each month passed."

He stared at the ceiling, looking, not for death, but for an absent cobweb.

"Why don't you answer?" she said. "Why don't you say something? D'you want some of this drink . . . some of this alcohol? You can have some of it if you like." She made gestures with the bottle and the glass.

"I don't like *aguardiente*," he said.

"Ah, no . . . no? You don't like *aguardiente*? What d'you like, then: champagne, I suppose, at this time of the morning? Well, perhaps you like *aguardiente* like this . . ." and she began to empty the bottle over his head. *Splash*, it went at first, then gluey drip.

He tried to sit up, his subsequent intention being to rise and strike her; but he had not the strength for even the first of those manœuvres, and, lying back, his feet upswung again, he looked at her and said:

"That stuff is inflammable, and I'd so much like a cigarette. Could you wipe my eyes and mouth at least?"

Maruja opened a drawer in a dresser. She laid three napkins on a small, round table near the door.

"Come and get them," she said. "Yes, yes . . . those happy times are over now. I suppose even Dominique would go and get the aspirin if she thought you had a headache. What a lovely time you must have had."

He said nothing. He continued to look at her. Since this was the only one of his appointments during that day for which he knew that he must give his entire heart, he was determined that for once he would be calm; for once use the uncertain gaze, and not the clapping mouth.

"Desmond, you can't go on like this, you know," she said.

"I don't intend to go on like this."

"Then get up . . . I'll help you . . . and come back with me to the shop."

"No, I'm never going to the shop again."

"How can you be so cruel! You hardly said a word to Luis just now, and you know quite well how fond he is of you."

"That's why it's better that he shouldn't see too much of me."

Maruja looked about her, but nothing seemed suitable for her purpose. Then she opened a drawer and found another napkin, and she wiped his face with that.

"Why can't it all be like it used to be?" she said. "There were just the three of us, and, sometimes, Barbara. I was happy then."

"No, you weren't," he said, "and you wouldn't be happy now if it began again."

"But I love you, Desmond, I don't care about that Nuria. I never cared about Dominique, either . . . did I? I know I'm better for you than they are."

"Ah, yes? In what respect?"

Maruja stamped her foot. "Oh, don't be so stupid, so cynical," she said. "You know it's true . . . you know it's true." She burst into tears.

He stood up, successfully this time. "You know," he said. "I really think I've done something to my heart this time, but unfortunately it's medical, not sentimental." He pulled up a chair, and sat down beside her, and took her hand, and stroked it. "Yes, of course, I love you," he said; "I always did love you, but what could I ever do about it, dearest, dearest Maruja?"

"You could have done," she said, "what all men seem to do."

"Oh yes, of course, and with what result? I think neither of us is much interested in clandestinity. It would have had to have been open; and what would have happened with that? . . . ruin for you—and in Spain it *is* ruin—and for me another cartload of remorse with floral decorations by your aunt, and from cousins come specially to denounce me from distant parts of the Peninsula."

Their two hands together, palping; finger within finger, palm against palm. Much can be done with hands; the most complicated of emotions can be expressed by hands—whereas feet are too often shod, and, beneath the table, surreptitious and ill-mannered.

"Would you have been frightened by my cousins?" she said.

"No—that's just the trouble—*not*—and trouble would have been the end of it."

"Don't be theoretical," she said. "Don't be theoretical . . . about *us*."

"I can't help being theoretical about something that never happened," he said. "Anyway, you mean, I think, theatrical, don't you?"

"If you like," said Maruja. "Yes, if you like." She touched his hand.

"What would have been the end of it?" he said again, and this time he not only touched, he held, her hand. "What would have been the end of it?"

"Does that matter?" she said. "Would that have mattered, once we'd begun?"

"You must have read many of those fairy stories," he said. He gulped, but, somehow, he kept it down: "It's deplorable, isn't it, to be reduced to this condition, to have somebody who loves you throwing something sticky over your hair? Do you know the end of those fairy stories?"

"I have read some of them," she said.

"Then, perhaps, you know that when the Prince Charming married the milkmaid they lived happily ever afterwards? Sometimes, of course, it was the other way round: the Princess married the intrepid but imprudent cowherd, but the only difference, as far as I can see, was one or two lovers more or less, as the case might arise. The pair lived happily ever after because, you see: within a year the Prince had two mistresses, and his wife had a boy-friend."

"Desmond, how can you be so cruel and cynical?"

"This is not cynicism, darling; it's just utter fatigue . . . utter, and utter, and utter. I don't know why people go to see psychiatrists? Any damned fool who's lived thirty years with himself must know all about himself, and if he doesn't, he's not worth saving, anyway. I was such a nice little boy when I started out. I had the good fortune to have an affair with a girl a little older than myself, when I was only fifteen. That was most timely, because it saved me from many of the monkey horrors of the British public school. Then I fell in love—you do at that age, you know, and, by Christ, it hurts . . . with somebody who didn't want me very much, because she was herself in love with somebody else much older, and much more remarkable: somebody of about my present age, incidentally."

"Who was she, Desmond?"

"You see!" he said. "Name, rank and number, and any special tattoo marks: that's all that women care about. The rival, even if obsolescent, must be identified, as if she were a twenty-year-old enemy plane."

"Everything you say is false, you know; Desmond . . . everything."

"You think so? I thought so once, too. I'm no Casanova and

certainly no Don Juan. You need a special kind of endurance, a secret fibre, to be able to listen to the chatter of women for hours every day . . . and yet I'm a person who likes women, who thinks they are much superior to men in many essential and important things."

"Desmond," she said, "you don't talk as if you liked women very much."

"I was thinking you might say that," he said. "It's always a woman's last argument. No, dear, I don't care for little boys with hairy thighs nor even for the middle-aged, the hairs upon whose thighs have worn thin with time and frustration and, above all, disappointment. I judge nobody; and I never will again judge or condemn anybody. When I was young I was so stupid . . . my God, so stupid. I'm still very stupid but at least I don't appear before you with some goddamned fancy formula. I mount the soap-box and I tell my audience, frankly, that there is no solution; and that they must endeavour to make the best of a very ill-paid job. Let's take off the roof tops; let's break down the doors. It is not a dishonourable procedure, really; and one sees such very interesting things. Love lasts two years. Then comes the transition, but very few married couples are able to make that transition. Nuria used to say to me that I presented the appearance of a man for whom nobody had ever taken much trouble. She was quite right; but she was also wrong. I merely presented the appearance of a man who knew it didn't last; and of course it never *does* last; it may be a summer, it may be a spring, it may be two years and it may be two stolen weeks, but it never, never lasts."

"But you didn't think like that when you were young, did you, Desmond?"

"No, I most certainly did not. I was a stupid little boy, and I had just two gears: the tough and the sentimental. The tough line was rather good, or so I thought at the time . . . it could be summed up by saying *bing-bong-bash*, and the bash was on a teapot, or somebody's chair. I began to grow up when I was about twenty-six. I suppose you could say that I was nearly adult now, but it would certainly be wrong to say that I enjoy the *feeling*. I was just a little younger than that when the hair first began to come out on my chest. I always did think it curious that this last, and most highly prized, evidence of masculinity should be so long

delayed. Now I have it everywhere, and people pull specimens out of my back; from *sitios* I can't even see. I dare say there's something symbolical about that but to me somehow it doesn't seem very subtle." He got up: "I'm going now," he said.

"Yes, I can see that," she said. "But where?"

"To see José Beltrán, of course. It's my last social appearance, apart from the taxi-driver to-night. Lend me a comb, will you?"

She did so. The hair was going at the back of his head, and his ears were red; but not because the world was talking of him.

"Won't you even go and meet your wife at the airport?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because no useful purpose would be served by it."

"You don't even want to see Geneviève again?"

"No."

"Oh, you're hateful . . . hateful, just because you're hurt."

"Yes. And that's what hurts the most."

She placed her hand upon his shoulder. "Perhaps I ought to tell you something?" she said.

He looked at her eyes searchingly. "All right," he said. "But wrap it up in cotton-wool, will you? My nerves are not so good to-day. I'm just like those others with their rheumatism, except that, for me, it seems to rain most often when the sky is clear."

"You ought to write popular songs, Desmond."

"Yes, I've often thought so. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say that I must have seemed a little breathless," said Maruja, "when you came into the shop."

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I didn't notice that."

"No," she said. "I don't suppose you did. But I was breathless because I got there just two minutes before you did."

"How do you mean?"

"When you answered the telephone this morning I thought I'd come and see you: I thought I might be able to help. I was just going in when I saw that man, her brother, in front of me. So I waited in the café across the street."

"You seem to have had a lot of milk-shakes to-day, Maruja."

"Why didn't he come out again, Desmond?"

"Because he's still there, of course."

She put her hand to her mouth: "No . . ." she said, "no . . ."

"Yes, I'm sorry, but there it is. But you needn't worry: he's nicely tucked away."

At this moment the woman, the owner of the shop, entered the room, and looked at them enquiringly. "Are you feeling better now?" she said.

"Yes, thank you, but I was a little clumsy. I spilt this bottle." He held it up. "Please allow me to pay for it."

And, after some demur, she did so.

Outside, he turned to Maruja. "Good-bye, dear," he said.

"Oh no," she said. "It's not good-bye . . . not yet."

"Well, just as you please."

"Your wife has a key to the flat. Supposing she goes there? Even if nobody else does, the porter will tell her you're in Barcelona."

"It doesn't matter. She won't find anything; and she won't find me, either."

Maruja was silent for a moment. Then: "I think I'll go down to the airport to meet her."

"Yes, that would be nice. That would be very nice indeed. Only . . ." suddenly he took hold of her arm. "Only . . . you won't say anything private, will you?"

"I didn't intend to say anything private, but I happen to have heard that Llavaneras is ill; and so this is perhaps the moment when I can help her."

"Yes, you're the proud and the good one all right," he said. They were standing in the doorway of a men's multiple tailors. He drew her in front of plate-glass labelled: '*Gabardinas de Veraneantes . . . muy elegantes*'. Then he kissed her while a salesman with a tape measure round his neck tapped him on the shoulder, murmuring that it lay within the power of all men to be well-dressed.

Half an hour later, Thornton called at José Beltran's flat in the Calle Borrell, only to be informed by his friend's sister that her brother was sleeping.

"Couldn't I just look in at him for a moment?" he said.

The sister was doubtful.

"Only a second," he pleaded. "I won't wake him up."

"Oh, very well; but take off your shoes, and don't make a noise. He's been very ill for more than two weeks now."

They tiptoed down the passage. She opened the bedroom door.

The room was small and dark, with view upon an area. José Beltran lay upon his back. The sheet was drawn up above his chin. Therefore it was not possible for Thornton to see much except the rather bushy eyebrows and the nose, already peaked and drawn, as if in death.

"What a pity," he said to the sister, as he was putting on his shoes again in the hall. "We could have had such an interesting conversation. He was the one man I wanted to talk to."

"Come back to-morrow. It varies from day to day. To-morrow he may feel quite well."

"All right."

He went downstairs. It was a long walk to the centre of the town. On the way he bought a cheap overnight bag, three shirts, and a toothbrush. The reception clerk in the Hotel Victoria recognised him but showed no particular surprise. Thornton spent some time looking down at the Plaza Catalunya from the balcony of his room. The view was the same, except perhaps that there were now more pigeons, as when he had first occupied another room on this floor, almost three years previously.

Late in the afternoon he went out and made his way to a café, opposite to offices of the Air Company. This was not an ideal vantage point, but there was no other from which he would not have risked being seen.

At a few minutes before seven the bus drew up. Among the passengers who disembarked he identified Dominique, Maruja and Geneviève. He was able to look at them for quite a long time because Dominique was arguing with the driver about something, evidently luggage. Dominique appeared well, and Geneviève had grown. She was dressed in blue overalls and was wearing her hair in pigtails, with red ribbons. She was holding a doll. All three went into the offices, and when they came out again Thornton noticed Geneviève pointing across the street at the café in which he was sitting. He knew what this meant, and that she would give her mother no peace until provided with an ice. He left his beer, therefore, and took refuge in the toilet. Unfortunately, this was a simple toilet with only one receptacle, and so he was subjected to some curious glances by other customers who desired to use the place and who, in order to do so, were obliged to brush past him.

Dominique could not have been sitting very far away because from time to time he could hear her voice, though never the actual

words. When he was quite sure that all three of them had gone, he emerged, finished his beer, and returned to the Hotel Victoria. At ten o'clock, having eaten some sandwiches in his room, he went out again, and spent the greater part of the night, with the taxi-driver, at various places of entertainment in Barceloneta. Returning once more to the hotel at about three in the morning he discovered Maruja asleep in his bed. In her hand she held a lock of hair which he identified as having come from the head of his daughter, Geneviève.

He did not wake Maruja, but spent what little remained of the night looking sometimes at the sleeping girl, and sometimes, from the balcony, at the silent square. At eight o'clock the floor waiter knocked on the door with breakfast. Maruja woke up, and he shared his coffee with her, which was something he had never done before with anybody. He also made her eat all his toast and marmalade.

They did not leave the hotel until well past midday, and during all of that morning neither of them spoke much. Downstairs, as they were leaving, Thornton was requested by the reception clerk to pay the full tariff for a double room; which he did, since in the circumstances the demand was fully justified.

He would not allow Maruja to come with him to the airport, but from a taxi he set her down at a small distance from the shop. He gave her a handkerchief, which she needed, and also his cuff-links, because these had once belonged to his father and for that reason he had always been fond of them.

His plane took off at five. The flight from Barcelona to Marseille is not a long one.

Eighteen

"Narciso!"

"Coming, Señor Keating."

Barry was standing on the table looking through the bars. A key groaned in the lock of the door down the passage. The old waiter entered.

"Where is she?" said Barry.

"Who do you mean, Señor Keating?"

"Don't be a fool, man. The girl on the balcony, of course."

"Ah, that's very sad, Señor Keating, very sad. I am obliged to say that I consider you as to blame in that affair."

"Why, what's happened?"

"She is married, señor. Her husband is a grocer. They live in Triana, across the river." Narciso sighed: "He was her *novio* before, of course, but what is a grocer . . . how can he compete with secret messages? One word from you, and all might have been different."

"How was I to know I was coming back here?" said Barry. He jumped off the table and began to brush his clothing, which was covered with flaked whitewash.

"Who waters the flowers now?" he said.

"Her mother," said Narciso.

"You'd better find out her address for me. There won't be any mistake this time. As soon as I get out I'll go there and buy a kilo of *garbanzos*."

"The husband is young, Señor Keating."

"The more fool him."

"He has also heard, I believe, what was going on between you."

"Even more foolish. He should have kept his ears closed."

"Ah, you are beyond hope, Señor Keating; and once again you have failed to sweep your cell."

At this moment a second warder entered, a thin fellow with a scar on his chin, whom Barry did not remember having seen before.

"You're wanted by the Governor; both of you," he said.

"This is quick work," remarked Barry. "I've hardly had time to get used to the old routine."

"You needn't think it means your release," said the thin warder nastily. "He didn't tell me to bring your papers or anything like that."

"In those sad circumstances," said Barry, "I'll be wicked: I won't put on my tie."

He put on his coat, however, and followed Narciso along the gallery. At the end of the gallery, beside the main staircase, the old convict whose single duty was to sweep each floor was sweeping now, watched with inscrutable placidity by the prison cat, who from time to time rubbed herself against his legs.

"Hullo," said Barry. "You all right . . . you happy in your work? They look after us in prison, don't they? They teach us a trade. Just think of all those horse-droppings on the crossings you'll sweep, when they let you out."

"I'm counting the days, *caballero*," said the old convict.

"Ah, yes . . . and how many now?"

"Just under six thousand. I broke the six thousand on my saint's day. What d'you think of that for a coincidence?"

"Don't be stupid, *Pepito*," said Narciso authoritatively. "You know well it will be under four thousand if you continue to behave yourself."

"Maybe that's just what he's afraid of," said Barry. "Maybe it's like life insurance in reverse. Maybe he's thinking that one day the blackness will come, and he'll take a swipe at you with that broom."

"The only kind of blackness you get on lentils and scrag is the one you get when you've been sitting, and start to stand up," said the old convict.

"You wouldn't hit me, would you, *Pepito*?" said Narciso, incredulously.

"No, perhaps not, but I might spike that other bastard one day," said the old convict, and he indicated the second warder, who, with fingers moving within his clasped hands, behind his back, was pacing another part of the gallery. "You can sharpen the point of a broom," he said. "If you really want to do it, you can do it with your teeth."

"That's a nice broom you have there," said Barry. He inspected it. Unseen by Narciso, he inserted a banknote between the martyred bristles.

"We mustn't keep the Governor waiting," he said.

"You'll come to a bad end, you will," the old convict cried after him.

"My dear fellow, we all of us know that," said Barry, turning, "but why waste time in thinking about an event so far ahead?"

In the annexe outside the Governor's office, Narciso paused. He took off his cap and laid it, in the regulation manner, athwart his bent forearm, in front of his chest. "Now, smarten yourself up, *Señor Keating*," he said. "We want to make a good impression, don't we?"

"Oh yes," said Barry. "Always."

They entered the office: then Narciso withdrew.

Don Esteban Gallangos was seated at his desk. He appeared both nervous and harassed, but, rising, he greeted Barry warmly:

"My dear friend, how are you? You must forgive my not having called you here before, but," he indicated the pile of papers on his desk, "since my return I have been a busy man."

"So I perceive. And how did you get on in Madrid?"

"Oh, Señor Keating, I beg you, please do not mention that painful subject again. I cannot imagine why I was given the appointment, for which I am entirely unsuited, unless it was to annoy Aranjuez. I could not understand the work at all; and still less believe in its value. I mean to say, Señor Keating," Don Esteban spread his hands wide, "the code names, that incomprehensible cypher, the constant necessity of paying small sums of money to people providing what seemed to be entirely valueless information concerning conversations in bars. I was very glad when they reinstated Aranjuez."

"Ah, they reinstated him, did they?"

"Yes, indeed. He's downstairs now; and wants to see you. Between ourselves, I think the whole business was arranged to—how shall I put it? . . . to curb his pride; to show him the whip as it were, if I may say so."

"Well, I trust they let him have a good look at it," said Barry. "It's a thing I've always wanted to do myself."

At this moment Aranjuez himself entered the room. If he had heard the last words of the above conversation, he gave no sign, but, advancing, extended his hand.

"How are you, Keating?"

"I'm very well, thank you. And you?"

"I'm very well, too."

"How about Moulay Hassan?" said Barry. "Is he also well?"

"I sincerely hope so," said Aranjuez, "otherwise it would all have been such a waste of time, wouldn't it? I understand he is living in Agadir at the moment, very discreetly, as a private gentleman. I was thinking of asking you to run him in some arms in a week or two."

"Oh no," said Barry. "Not me, and not arms."

"Well, we can always discuss the matter again later." Aranjuez turned to the Governor. "Don Esteban, would you consider me very rude if I asked you to leave us?"

Don Esteban rose. He held a piece of paper in his hand. "I do so willingly," he said, "but before I go I really must ask you to explain what *this* means. My dear Aranjuez, some of the things you were doing during your stay here I can't make head or tail of."

Aranjuez took the paper. "It seems very simple to me," he said. "It is an order for a punch-bag and fifty pairs of boxing gloves. I came to the conclusion, during my stay here, that the most pressing need was to instil into the prisoners the simple, manly virtues."

"They would hardly have come here without them, would they?" said Barry.

"I have also received an invoice for ropes, and for mats," interposed Don Esteban. "What can these mats be . . . not for praying, surely? We have no Moslems here."

"Maybe they were table mats?" suggested Barry. "Aranjuez has always been an exponent of gracious living."

"You both show a deplorable lack of insight," replied Aranjuez. "The mats were for wrestling, of course: I began, and I trust you will continue, night classes in both Greco-Roman and Judo-Japanese, and it may interest you to know that, far from persons convicted of crimes of violence showing any particular prowess, the category of crook which most impressed me were the forgers."

"That's very easily explained," said Barry. "The forgers are better fed, because their work never ends. Even when you put them inside, they forge canteen vouchers."

"But why the ropes?" said Don Esteban. "Is it wise, d'you think, as I presume you intended to teach men to climb ropes in prison?"

"I consider it very sound psychology," said Aranjuez. "If a man finds himself too weak to get up a rope in a spirit of fun, he is unlikely to have one thrown over a wall for his use, for a more serious purpose."

Always a lingerer, Don Esteban lingered now. Thus, some minutes passed before Aranjuez and Barry were alone together: to face a conversation which both of them considered as important.

"It was nice of you to have me picked up like that in Cartagena," said Barry, when the door closed.

"I have always been a specialist in averting tragedies," said Aranjuez. "Stupidities, also."

"I don't mind so much about myself, but you might have left my men alone."

"Your men are all right. You can have them back any time you like. I had them taken to a hotel in Malaga. I understand they're a great success there, too. Elderly American ladies leave their villas even during the *siesta* hours to come into town and pay their bar bills: in exchange for fascinating tales of life on the high seas."

"Why did you have me picked up?" said Barry.

"Because I thought you might make some noble gesture when Thornton was leaving, of course."

"You're a little behind the times, aren't you, Aranjuez?"

"No, I think it's Thornton who's behind them now. About three days behind them, to be exact."

"Where is his wife?"

"We'll talk about his wife later, if you don't mind."

"I'd rather talk about her now."

"Did she make so indelible an impression on you, Keating? Would you like to be a stepfather? I dare say it could be arranged. I have her in a hotel, too . . . in Barcelona . . . but not quite such a good one. Her stories are so much less amusing."

"Where is Thornton, Aranjuez?"

"My dear Keating, this is a Catholic country and so our very orthodoxy informs us that there are only three places where he can be . . . his essence, I mean; his courageous spirit, if I may use those stirring words," Aranjuez paused. He looked at Barry obliquely. "As for his body, I saw pieces of it on a slab in a mortuary in Marseille yesterday morning. The surgeon who was dissecting it in the general interests of science kept waving a wicked-looking knife at me and saying that the man's spleen was twice the normal size. Do you think Thornton could have been aware of that during his lifetime? Was it that which inconvenienced him?"

Barry was silent for a long time: twenty-four seconds.

"How did he die?" he said.

"That's very interesting. Poinot, of course, balked of his prey, was inclined to place the worst construction on the whole affair, maintaining that Thornton had poisoned himself just before his plane touched down at Istres—but fortunately the stewardess, who looked after him when he was taken ill on board, could

maintain that he had nothing more lethal than successive double brandies in front of him throughout the trip. He kept calling her Phyllis, incidentally, so no doubt his mind was working back towards a name, which, for us, will always be no more than a name. Fifteen years ago, I'd say: at that age, they tend to cast back just about that far."

"We all know you're a clever child," said Barry. "We know you know just what Giron said to his confessor, but would you mind dropping that matter for a moment, because it's somewhat out of place."

"There's no friend like a dead friend, is there?" said Aranjuez.

"How did he die?" said Barry.

"They took him off the plane on a stretcher. They took him—it was France, after all, so they examined his wallet first—to a Cinique in the Rue Saint Ferréol, and that was where he died, in a white bed, without a priest, with just a nun beside him, and a detective doing crossword puzzles underneath a desk lamp on the far side of the room."

"But what was it, man?" said Barry. "What did he die of, then?"

"I think," said Aranjuez, "that they call it poisoning of some kind. You can get it from tins of *pâté* you leave open too long. I understand that it's very painful, too. He talked while he was having, about a little bottle he'd hidden in a shoe, about a year ago. Doesn't that conjure up for you scenes: a whole way of life and of mutual oppression?"

"Oh, my God," said Barry.

"I see that it does," said Aranjuez. He paused, and looked at Barry. "Do you know," he said, "what the body-carver said to me—for you mustn't think for a moment that he paused in his work—while he was cutting up one particular part of the body?"

"No. Tell me."

"He said," said Aranjuez, "he said, and I swear he said it with the same kind of awe, the remarkable words: '*And only last night . . .*'"

"And what did you say?" said Barry.

"I said that the night was a vague and imprecise term in both of our countries."

"Who was with him when he died?" said Barry, softly.

"I've told you: the nun, and a Corsican, the manacles, and a ball-point pen."

"And some *aiolli* in the Corsican's stomach, no doubt; but I'm not interested in that. *What did he say?*"

"What do you expect him to say?" said Aranjuez. "He said nothing, and even if he had said something, I think it most unlikely that the detective would have understood."

"How was the doctor able to make that remark about the last night?" said Barry.

"I expect he made some little experiment in a test tube, over a gas burner, with little strips of lately living flesh," said Aranjuez. "You must remember that we are all now ruled by men who know why it rains, and even when it will rain, but who are quite incapable of understanding what rain *does* to you."

"And now?" said Barry.

"That is rather more complicated. You can come out of here with me at this moment, if you wish: I have your money for you in Madrid, and your friend, Mariano, is waiting for you, incidentally. I think you did remarkably well in the circumstances, I shall be very pleased—I might even say proud—to employ you again . . . I was quite serious about the arms, but I am now going to be, for the first time in my life, indiscreet: I am going to say that I think you are valuable."

"Where is Desmond buried?" said Barry.

Aranjuez was silent for a moment. Then: "You are trying to make me say something stupid, perhaps?" he said.

"No, I promise you not. Where is he buried?"

"Keating, you must know quite well what happened to his body?"

"I promise you I don't, but I know where it ought to be. There's a British military cemetery in Marseille, at Madragues. It's a very pretty place. The poplars abound. I used to go and collect snails on its lawns. But there are too many Sikhs who died of pneumonia, too far from Gallipoli. Desmond would just put the balance right."

"My position is not very strong with Poinsoot over all this," said Aranjuez. "There have been accusations of a breach of faith; always difficult for an honourable man to support."

"Where is Desmond buried?" said Barry.

"Desmond is not buried," said Aranjuez. "I think I told you

about the pieces, didn't I? Now I see I have to tell you about the bins."

"What bloody bins . . . what are you talking about?"

"Some goes into brine for students to work on; some goes elsewhere. Thornton was not without humour. Don't you think he would have laughed had he known that young men, cursing, would attempt to pass examination, one day, in terms of their agility in opening and shutting his knee-cap?"

"Yes, but the bins . . . the bins."

"The *dustbins*, Keating. Only what is truly perishable is burnt."

"You are really a hard man," said Barry. "Now I really do think so."

"On my way back here, I stopped off in Barcelona, and went to his flat," said Aranjuez. "One of the things I found there we will perhaps have occasion to talk about some other day, but it will be a day a long time from now. I found the remains of the *pâté* and I also found the little bottle . . . no longer inside the shoe, but standing upright upon a folded, dirty shirt. The dead man's own diagnosis is quite exact."

"Yes," said Barry. "And now I feel at last dead, myself."

"You do not feel in the least bit dead," said Aranjuez. "You are at the moment debating, in spite of this tragedy, how best to come to terms with me."

"You think so?"

"My dear fellow: Life is so interminable. How can we possibly keep those New Year resolutions?" He paused to light a cigarette: "These things fall into their perspective later," he said, as he inhaled the smoke.

La descente aux profondeurs de l'être, la confiance accordée aux révélations du songe, de la folie, des vertiges, et des extases, l'esprit du poète aux écoutes des dons du hasard . . . / une partie autrement grave se joue dans ces vies naufragées, dans ces œuvres presque toutes imparfaites: une vibration vient nous atteindre encore.

Albert Béguin—"Les Romantiques et L'Inconscient."